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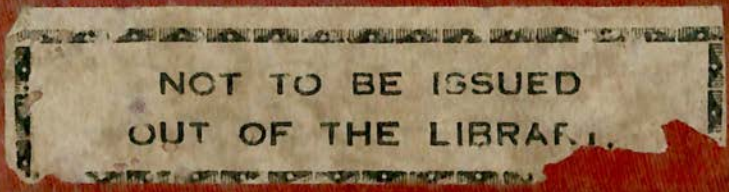
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PRACTICAL AND FAMILIAR

SERMONS,

DESIGNED FOR

PAROCHIAL AND DOMESTIC INSTRUCTION.

By the Rev. EDWARD COOPER,

RECTOR OF HAMSTALL-RIDWARE AND OF YOXALL IN THE COUNTY OF STAFFORD, AND FORMERLY FELLOW OF ALL-SOULS' COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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TO

HIS MUCH ESTEEMED AND VALUED FRIEND,

JOHN GISBORNE, ESQ.

OF ORGREAVE HALL, IN THE COUNTY OF STAFFORD,

THE AUTHOR

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBES

THIS THIRD VOLUME

OF

PRACTICAL AND FAMILIAR

SERMONS

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CONTENTS

OF

THE THIRD VOLUME.

SERMON I.

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.

JUDGES, iii. 20. *I have a Message from God unto thee.* - - - - Page 1

SERMON II.

JESUS THE GREAT SUBJECT OF CHRISTIAN PREACHING.

ACTS, viii. 35. *Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.* - - - - 17

SERMON III.

THE BROAD AND THE NARROW WAY.

ST. MATTHEW, vii. 13, 14. *Enter ye in at the strait Gate: for wide is the Gate and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.* 32

SERMON IV.

THE REAL CAUSE OF MEN'S REJECTION OF THE GOSPEL STATED AND ILLUSTRATED.

JOHN, v. 40. *And Ye will not come to Me, that Ye might have Life.* - - Page 47

SERMON V.

DIVINE FORBEARANCE TOWARDS SINNERS.

HOSEA, xi. 8, 9. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim How shall I deliver thee Israel? How shall make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger: I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man.* 63

SERMON VI.

DESCRIPTION AND DIGNITY OF TRUE CHRISTIANS.

ST. MATTHEW, xii. 50. *Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my Brother, and Sister, and Mother.* 79

SERMON VII.

THE TENDENCY TO WEARINESS IN WELL-DOING ILLUSTRATED AND OPPOSED.

2 THESSALONIANS, iii. 13. *But ye, Brethren, be not weary in well-doing.* 95

SERMON VIII.

CHRISTIANS ENCOURAGED AGAINST THE FEAR OF MAN.

ISAIAH, li. 7, 8. *Hearken unto me, Ye that know righteousness, the People in whose heart is my law; fear Ye not the reproach of men, neither be Ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.* - - - - Page 110

SERMON IX.

CAUTIONS AND CONSOLATIONS.

JEREMIAH, viii. 20. *The Harvest is past, the Summer is ended; and we are not saved.* 126

SERMON X.

THE FALL AND RECOVERY OF MAN.

ROMANS, v. 19. *For as by one man's disobedience many were made Sinners: so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.* 144

SERMON XI.

THE WORLD AND THE CHRISTIAN.

1 PETER, iv. 4, 5. *Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you; who shall give ac-*

count to Him, that is ready to judge the Quick and the Dead - - - Page 160

SERMON XII.

THE NATURE OF SIN, OF REPENTANCE, AND OF PARDONING MERCY, ILLUSTRATED IN THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE, xv. 32. *It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found.* 178

SERMON XIII.

THE DANGER OF PARTAKING OF OTHER MEN'S SINS POINTED OUT AND APPLIED.

1 TIMOTHY, v. 22. *Neither be partaker of other Men's Sins. Keep thyself pure.*

SERMON XIV.

MERCY IN THAT DAY.

2 TIMOTHY, i. 18. *The Lord grant unto him, that he may find Mercy of the Lord in that Day.* 214

SERMON XV.

THE HOLY SPIRIT THE COMFORTER.

JOHN, xiv. 16. *And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth.* - - - - - 230

SERMON XVI.

CERTAINTY OF SIN FINDING US OUT.

NUMBERS, xxxii. 23. *Be sure your Sin will find you out.* - - - Page 244

SERMON XVII.

THE WEDDING GARMENT.

MATTHEW, xxii. 11, 12, 13. *And when the King came in to see the Guests, he saw there a man, which had not on a Wedding Garment. And he said unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a Wedding Garment? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the Servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* 262

SERMON XVIII.

YOUTH SOLEMNLY ADMONISHED.

ECCLESIASTES, xi. 9. *Rejoice, O Young Man, in thy Youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy Youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into Judgment.* - - - - 279

SERMON XIX.

GOD'S TENDER EXPOSTULATION WITH YOUNG PERSONS.

JEREMIAH, iii. 4. *Wilt thou not from this time cry*

unto me, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my Youth? - - - - - Page 296

SERMON XX.

THE WORD OF THE LORD GLORIFIED.

2 THESSALONIANS, iii. 1. *Finally, Brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you.* 312

SERMON I.

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.

JUDGES, iii. 20.

I have a Message from God unto thee.

IF we turn to the chapter from which these words are taken, we shall find, that they were spoken by Ehud; a man whom GOD had raised up to be a deliverer to his people Israel: and they were addressed to Eglon king of Moab, whom the Israelites had served for eighteen years. Long had they groaned under his yoke: but at length they cried unto the Lord; and he heard their cry, and helped them. Ehud, acting under a divine commission, went to the king; and being admitted into his presence, addressed him in the words of the text, "I have a message from God unto thee." And what was the message? It was a message of wrath: a message, dreadful to him, to

whom it was sent: a message delivered not in word, but in deed; not with the lips, but with the hand. For no sooner did the king arise out of his seat, but Ehud seized a dagger, which had been purposely concealed, and thrust it into his body and slew him.

In reading this history, let us not suppose that it is related for our imitation. We are not, in this manner, to free ourselves, even from oppression and tyranny. Nothing but a divine commission could have justified Ehud in *thus* taking away the life of the king of Moab. Without such a commission, the whole proceeding would have been very sinful. The Lord however is not confined in his use of means. He may employ any that He pleases. And whether he execute his judgements by one instrument, or by another, by sickness and disease, by storm and tempest, by the hand of a man, or by the sword of an angel, He is still "righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works." Let us then rather learn from this narrative to fear God and his judgements; to dread provoking the Lord to anger; and to pray that we may not be cut off in our sins. "From sudden death, good Lord, deliver us!"

But though such was the occasion on which these words were spoken, they need not in our application of them be limited to it. We

may consider them as spoken by all the Lord's servants. Every Minister of the Gospel in one sense may use them. And in this view, there is not a single individual in any congregation to whom the minister may not solemnly address himself, and truly say, "I have a message from God unto thee." This is the use which I now purpose to make of these words; and to do it with the greater effect, I shall first offer some few observations, which will help to explain and justify this application of the passage. I observe, then,

I. That the Ministers of the Gospel are God's messengers. They are not indeed his messengers in the sense in which Ehud was his messenger. They do not claim to themselves as he might have done, an express and a personal commission from God. Neither are they his messengers in the sense in which the Prophets and Apostles were his messengers. They have nothing to *reveal* to men. They do not profess to make any *new* communication of the Divine Will. They make no pretensions to any miraculous power or inspiration, nor to any *such* authority as that which the first Christian Preachers possessed. Still, however, they may be truly said to be God's messengers: for they are sent by Him to remind men of His will. They are especially appointed to

the office of teachers, and remembrancers. They come in God's name; and are sent to declare his truths. The Scriptures are the Book from which they profess to receive their instructions: and so far as they comply with these instructions, and preach according to this Book, so far the message which they deliver is in fact God's message. Though delivered by man, it yet virtually comes from God: and in this sense, then, those who bring it are his messengers. It is in the same sense, that they are sometimes said to be "Workers together with God," and at other times, his "Ambassadors," who address men in his stead, and by whom, as it were, God is said to beseech them. I observe,

II. That the Ministers of the Gospel must be faithful in delivering their message. Being God's messengers, being put in trust with the Gospel of Christ, they must discharge their trust with boldness and fidelity, as those that must give account. There is no choice left to them in this matter. They are not at liberty to do as they please; to withhold the message or not, as their own inclination may lead them: but they are to speak boldly, as they ought to speak; with "great plainness of speech," not "handling the word of God deceitfully," nor

"keeping back any thing that may be profitable" to their hearers. This is the duty required of them; a duty which, by the most powerful motives, they are constrained to discharge. St. Paul tells us, for his part, that "necessity was laid upon him; yea," he adds, "woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel."* The unwillingness of men to hear the truth will be no excuse for keeping it back from them. However unpleasant it may be, still they must hear it. Attend to the commission, which the Lord gave to his servant Ezekiel: "And thou, Son of Man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words. Thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. — And thou, Son of Man, hear what I say unto thee: Be not thou rebellious, like that rebellious house." And in another place, "Son of Man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee, receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears: and go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." While in another passage the danger which the Prophet would incur by not

* 1 Cor. ix. 16.

delivering the message committed to him, is thus forcibly declared: "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die: and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity: but his blood will I require at thine hand."* And to revert again to the case of St. Paul, he calls the elders of the Church at Ephesus to witness, that he was "pure from the blood of all men;" "for," says he (and mark the reason), "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."† His faithfulness in having delivered the message entrusted to him, was the ground of his confidence, because it was the proof of his integrity. Of such vast importance is fidelity in this great office. I observe,

III. That if men refuse to attend to the message thus delivered to them, it is at their own peril. This inference naturally springs from the foregoing observations. For if the Ministers of the Gospel are God's messengers, and are required to be faithful in delivering their message; then doubtless those, to whom it is sent, are equally required to receive it with attention and sub-

* Ezek. ii. 6, 7, 8. — iii. 10, 11. 18.

† Acts, xx. 26, 27.

mission; and cannot reject it, without the greatest danger to themselves. Our Saviour has put this matter beyond all doubt: for he expressly said to his Apostles, when he sent them to preach the Gospel, "He that receiveth you, receiveth me." But, on the other hand, "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words; Verily, I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of Judgement, than for that city." * And though this declaration was made immediately to the Apostles themselves, yet from what has been already said, we may clearly infer, that it is in a great degree applicable to all other ministers of the Gospel. For since the word which they preach is the same which the Apostles preached, so, not to receive them, nor to hear their words, will equally expose those, who are liable to such a charge, to the righteous anger of God. Hence it is, that these admonitions are so frequently given. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." "Take heed how ye hear;" seeing that to hear the word of God without receiving and profiting by it, will sink persons into so much deeper condemnation. And hence also it is, that the preaching of the Gospel is called not only

* Matt. xiv. 15.

"the savour of life unto life," but also "the savour of death unto death." All this indeed must be plain and level to the meanest understanding. Who does not see, that to reject, or, which is the same thing, to refuse to attend to a message sent from God, is of itself a sin of a crimson dye, and greatly adds to a man's guilt? It is a principle strongly laid down by Christ himself, and no less strongly confirmed by reason, that "to whomsoever much is given, of him much will be required:" that is, every man will be called to account for the privileges and opportunities which he has enjoyed. And what greater privilege can be conferred on any one than that of hearing the word of God? What opportunity more important and valuable can be vouchsafed to him, than that of becoming wise unto salvation? On every ground, then, if he reject the message of God, he rejects it at his peril; and cannot, if he persist in the rejection, but be punished with a more aggravated punishment.

From these observations, I shall now proceed to a more direct application of the words of the text: — "I have a message from God unto thee."

It appears, from what has been said, that the Minister of the Gospel has a message

from God to his hearers: that he must be faithful in delivering this message; and that it deeply concerns them to see how they receive it. It may then be reasonably asked, 'What is the message which he brings?' — In general, the substance of it is this "That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;" that "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*;" that the Almighty in infinite pity to our souls, has provided a way of access unto himself; a way, in which we may draw near to him with confidence now, and may be assured of a glorious entrance into his presence hereafter; a way in which our sins may be pardoned, our souls may be made holy, and the Kingdom of Heaven laid open to us; — that this way is by faith in Jesus Christ, whose blood has been shed to atone for our sins, and to purchase for us the gift of the Holy Spirit, and a title to eternal life and glory; — that whosoever now comes to God by this way, shall be graciously received; but that whosoever refuses to come, shall bring on himself greater condemnation.

This, in general, is the purport and sum of that message, which the minister of God brings to his hearers. It is the message,

* 1 Tim. i. 15. — 2 Cor. v. 19.

which he is commissioned to carry to all people. But this general message branches into a variety of particulars; and in fact has something distinct to say to every individual according to his state and character; nor, till it be thus personally applied, will it probably be heard with much real profit, or come home with power to the heart.

May the Lord be with us by his Spirit, while I endeavour thus to deliver and apply this message! — To this end, let me point out what it says to persons of different characters.

1. To the careless, thoughtless person; to the person who, whether old or young, whether learned or ignorant, whether rich or poor, is living in a state of actual unconcern, with respect to his soul and Eternity. Many, it is to be feared, are living in this state. Industrious, it may be, in their calling, decent in their conduct, even respectable in their general character, so far as this world is concerned, they are yet criminally indifferent to another world. If they make some little appearance of religion, and occasionally join in the outward forms of it, yet they have no *serious* or *abiding* thoughts on the subject. Religion is not a matter in which they feel any real interest. Other things engage their minds, and stir

up their desires and wishes, their hopes and fears; but the *one thing needful* is neglected, and makes no deep or lasting impression on their hearts. Now to all such persons, to any one among us who answers this description, there is a message in the Gospel: and the message is this: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." "It is high time to awake out of sleep: — for the night is far spent, the day is at hand." "Strive to enter in at the straight gate." "Consider your ways." "Lay hold on eternal life." *

2. Let us turn next to the ungodly and the profane: to those who are living in the allowed practice of some known sin; in the habitual indulgence of sensual lusts, of dishonest inclinations, of evil tempers; — to those who are ready to run into excess, whenever an opportunity offers; or of overreaching and imposing on others, whenever the means may be in their power; or of giving way to passion, envy, or malice, whenever the temptation recur. What is the message of the Gospel to all persons of this description? "Know ye not, that the unrighteous, and they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever

* Ephes. v. 14. — Rom. xiii. 11, 12. — Luke, xiii. 24.

a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men." * You are only treasuring up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath. Be warned in time. Break off your sins by repentance; "for except ye repent, ye shall perish." Be converted and believe the Gospel: for all the unconverted, and all the unbelieving, will "have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."

3. The next person to be addressed is the humble and serious enquirer after Divine Truth: the person whose soul is athirst for God; who, being brought to feel the value and importance of heavenly knowledge, is anxiously seeking for it in all the appointed means; who with this view reads and hears the word of God; listens to it with meekness and attention; prays for wisdom from above; and searcheth for it as for hid treasure. Is there a person of this description among us, there is a message also from God unto him; a message full of grace and consolation. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Because you seek, you shall find; "for every one that seeketh, findeth." "If any of you lack wisdom, let

* 1 Cor. vi. 9. — Gal. v. 21. — vi. 7. — Rom. i. 18.

him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."*

4. There is yet another sort of persons, to whom a word may pointedly be spoken. They are those, who having once known the way of righteousness, are turned from the holy commandment delivered unto them. They are persons who, at some time or other, have been convinced of the importance of religion, and have made even something of a serious profession of it. Their affections have been excited by the truths of the Gospel. They have "felt the powers of the world to come." They have been conscious that a great change has been wanting in their hearts and lives: and under these impressions they have begun to amend their ways, and for a time to walk in new paths. But their goodness has been like a morning cloud: it has gradually passed away. Their serious resolutions have in the end come to nothing. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," have proved too strong for their convictions. Old habits have prevailed, and have recovered their former power over them. They are become remiss in coming to church, careless in reading the Bible, negligent in

* Matt. v. 6. — vii. 8. — James, i. 5.

their private devotions. Their conscience is growing every day more hardened. Their affections are returning fast to the world. The ways of sin give them more pleasure than the ways of God. Now, if there are any persons of this sort among us, let them know that there is a message also for them. You are drawing fast back into perdition. You are joining yourselves to the number of those of whom the Lord says, "My soul shall have no pleasure in them." O beware of your danger, your latter state is likely to be worse than your first. "Remember therefore (saith the Lord) from whence thou art fallen; and repent and do thy first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."*

5. But perhaps there may be one of another description among us. There may be one whose heart now labours under a sense of sin; who being brought to see his guilt and danger, is full of fear, and trembles for the consequences. He feels that he has long time offended God, and has deeply incurred his wrath; and *now* what shall he do? How shall he escape the sentence of his righteous law? Whither shall he flee? What shall he do to be saved? Is there a person here

* Hebrews, x. 38. — Rev. ii. 5.

who feels, who thinks, who enquires thus; who condemns himself, who cries for mercy? Let it be said to this distressed, but contrite soul, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Be of good cheer. The salvation which thou longest after is at hand. A way of escape is open to thee. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." He has found a ransom, and will keep thee from going down into the pit. He is more ready to save thee, than thou art to be saved. He came from Heaven, and died on the cross, on purpose that he might save every humble and contrite soul. He cries aloud, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden."* Flee then to him for safety. Because thou condemnest thyself, He will not condemn thee. Because thou comest unto Him, He will save thee with an everlasting salvation. May His grace teach, persuade, and help thee to come; so shalt thou find rest unto thy soul.

6. There is yet one other person who demands our notice, — the established Christian; the man who, having fled to Christ for refuge, from the guilt and power of sin, has found peace and joy in believing; and being now professedly devoted to the Lord's

* Luke, xv. 10. — xvi. 31. — Matt. 11. 28.

service, is living in hope of the glory that shall be revealed. "There is a message from God unto thee." — "Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "Thou art a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid;" therefore, "let thy light shine before men." Walk worthy of the holy calling wherewith thou art called. Abound in good works. "Be not weary in well doing." "Grow in grace," and "let thy profiting appear unto all men." Bear in mind the many dangers which threaten thee. *Within* is a treacherous and a deceitful heart. *Without*, is an ensnaring and a tempting world. *On every side* are innumerable spiritual enemies, which seek thy ruin. "Be sober, therefore; be vigilant." "Be not high-minded, but fear." "Walk humbly with thy God." "Quench not the Spirit." "Pray without ceasing."* Above all things "look unto Jesus." Live by faith on Him. Draw out of His fulness a supply for all thy wants. Trust to Him in every time of need. "Go forth in His strength, make mention of His righteousness only," and doubt not His power and faithfulness, to keep that which thou hast committed to him, against the day of his appearing.

* Rev. ii. 10. — Matthew, v. 16. — 2 Peter, iii. 18. — 1 Thes. v. 17. 19.

SERMON II.

JESUS, THE GREAT SUBJECT OF CHRISTIAN PREACHING.

ACTS, viii. 35.

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

THE whole circumstances connected with this passage of Scripture, are of a very interesting and instructive tendency. Philip, not the Apostle so called, but another of the same name, who was a preacher of the Gospel, had been directed by an angel of the Lord to go into a particular part of the road which led from Jerusalem towards the South Country. No sooner was he arrived there, but a person came travelling along the road. He was an Ethiopian, a man of great consequence in his own country, possessing a place of considerable authority and trust under the queen his mistress. This man, from motives of piety, had

left his own country for a time, and regardless of the length and danger of the journey, had gone up to Jerusalem, for the sake of worshipping the God of Israel. He was now returning home, and as he travelled in his chariot, was employed in studying the word of God. Philip, through a secret suggestion of the Spirit on his mind, hastened up to the chariot; and finding that the book which the Ethiopian had open before him, was the Prophecy of Isaiah, he enquired of him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" The man, instead of being offended at this question from a stranger, with great modesty and humility answered, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" He acknowledged his own ignorance and weakness; and far from being too proud to receive instruction, he desired Philip to come up and sit with him and teach him. Now it was so ordered by Providence, that the passage of Scripture, which at this time engaged his attention, was that remarkable prediction of Christ detailed in the 53rd chapter of the book. The place which he read was this; "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb, dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgement was taken away: and who shall

declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth." The Ethiopian saw that there was something remarkable in this passage, and that it related to some extraordinary person: but he was unable to discover its meaning. He said therefore to Philip, "I pray thee of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself or of some other man?" "Then," (as we read in the text) "Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." We are not told the particulars of his discourse, but we may readily conjecture what they were. He doubtless took occasion to show how exactly and circumstantially this prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. He would show how *He* was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb, dumb before his shearers, how *He* opened not his mouth. How in his humiliation *His* judgement was taken away; for He met with no justice from his accusers and judges; but "his life was taken from the earth" by a cruel and an iniquitous sentence. At the same time, "Who shall declare His generation?" His wonderful generation as the Only-Begotten of the Father; his miraculous conception and birth, as the Son of a pure Virgin: at once David's Son, and David's Lord: the Son of God

and the Son of Man: God and Man in one Christ. These were the particulars, which Philip, we may conclude, would take occasion, from this passage of Scripture, to set before his attentive and listening hearer. But he would not stop here. He would add many other truths, to which the other parts of the same chapter would naturally lead. He would not fail to state the *reasons* of this wonderful transaction. *Why* so extraordinary a person had submitted to so signal an humiliation, and had suffered in so remarkable a way. He would show in the words of the prophet, that Jesus, in undergoing these sufferings and indignities, had "borne *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows: that He had been wounded for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities; that *all we* like sheep had gone astray; that we had turned every one to his own way: but, that the Lord had laid on *Him* the iniquity of *us* all." This humiliation and obedience of the Son of God unto death, even the death of the Cross, had been designed as an atonement, a sacrifice, a propitiation for the sins of mankind: that so "the chastisement of their peace might be upon Him, and that by his stripes they might be healed." The preacher would further declare, that this great work was

now accomplished: that Jesus; having been numbered with the transgressors, and having poured out his soul unto death as an offering for sin, was now risen from the dead to reap the fruit of all his labours: that by the knowledge of Himself He would now justify many; and in the redemption of innumerable souls from the bondage of sin and Satan, He would see the travail of his soul, and would be satisfied: that by the preaching of the Gospel, which was now commanded to be proclaimed to all people, remission of sins was freely offered in the name of Jesus to every sinner, who should believe in Him, and accept the offers of this great Salvation; while, on the other hand, excessive and aggravated punishment would be the merited portion of all those, who should reject these offers, and by their sins and wilful impenitence should crucify the Son of God afresh.

Such, we may conclude, were the great and instructive Truths, which Philip on this occasion explained and enforced. We know what was the result of his preaching. His words, being listened to with attention, were received with gladness, and were mixed with faith in the heart. The Ethiopian, believing with all his heart, that Jesus was the Son of God, earnestly requested to be admitted

among the number of his followers: and being straightway baptized by Philip, went on his way rejoicing.

These are the interesting, and instructive circumstances connected with the text. They are interesting, inasmuch as they exhibit the influence of Divine Truth on a mind duly prepared by Divine Grace for its reception. They are instructive, inasmuch as they set before us, what is the great duty of the Minister of the Gospel; and what is to be the grand subject of his ministry. He is to preach: and he is to preach *Jesus*. The truths which Philip enforced and explained to the Ethiopian, respecting the person, sufferings, and atonement of Jesus, are the same great truths which the Minister of the Gospel is to explain and enforce to his hearers, and which, if he be faithful in his office, he *does* explain and enforce to them. Would that the effect produced by *his* preaching now, were in general such as that produced by the preaching of Philip! Baptized, indeed, his hearers have already been. But would that he could persuade them to believe and to do all which that Baptism implies! Would that he could bring them to be Christians, not only in name and in profession, but in truth and in deed! Would that he could prevail on them to *believe with*

all their heart; and in the lively exercise of that faith, *to go on their way rejoicing!*

Philip, indeed, in preaching to the Ethiopian had two circumstances greatly in his favour. The truths which he taught were new; and the person, to whom he taught them, was humbly desirous of instruction. How different are the circumstances, under which the Minister of the Gospel is at this day obliged to conduct his preaching? He has no new truths to produce; no new doctrines, which by their novelty may engage the attention of his hearers, and thus may strike more forcibly on their minds. The truths, which he proclaims, are those which he has been proclaiming perhaps for years. In stating them, the utmost he can hope to accomplish is to use some little variety in his mode of explaining and enforcing them. The doctrines, which he presses on his congregation, are those to which they have been listening, it may be, for years; and listening with little seeming improvement. With how slender a prospect therefore of success does he often renew the repetition of them: and how greatly are his hopes of making a profitable impression damped! — Consider next the state of the congregation. Instead of being humbly and anxiously desirous of instruc-

tion, some of his hearers are too proud to receive the truth; others are utterly indifferent to it; some appear to listen, but pay no attention to what he says; others attend, indeed, but far from wishing to get improvement, seek only to amuse their ear or gratify their curiosity: some wait on his ministry for form, or for fashion's sake; others from worldly views and interested motives. While such is the state of things, (and that it is so, we need only refer to observation and experience,) it cannot be a matter of wonder, that the preaching of the Gospel should oftentimes produce so little effect, and that men should continue so unfruitful under it. In fact, if the preacher looked only on this side of the question, he might often be tempted to desist from his work, and to give up his attempt in despair. But the subject may be viewed in another light. The Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation. The preaching of Jesus is still the appointed instrument for saving sinners: and the Lord will still bless his own appointment. He hath promised to be with his ministers, in the discharge of their office, "alway, even unto the end of the world." He sends forth his Spirit to give power and efficacy to his word: and whenever this is the case, these seeming difficulties vanish; the heart of

stone becomes a heart of flesh; the indifferent become attentive; the thoughtless serious; the proud are humbled; the sleeping are wakened; the dead are quickened. — May such at this time be the proofs of his presence with us! May some hearts among us feel this day, and own his power! In the humble hope, that He will now accompany his Gospel with his Spirit, it shall be the object of the remaining part of this discourse, to preach unto you *Jesus*. You are not to expect, as has been already observed, that any *new* truths respecting Him will be disclosed. You can only be reminded of truths which you have often heard, and which it is probable you already know: truths, however, which it is not enough to hear and to know; but which, in order to profit us, must sink deep into our hearts.

First, then, let us call to mind *who* Jesus was. Let us consider his essential greatness and Majesty. He was not an angel: not one of the highest order of angels. He was the Lord of angels: the maker and upholder of all things, whom all the angels of God worship. He was the Only Begotten of the Father; one with Him in Power and Glory: His dearly beloved Son, who "in the beginning was with God, and was God:" "the brightness of his Glory, and the ex-

press image of His Person." Let us attend to the language in which St. Paul speaks of Him in his Epistle to the Colossians. "By Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist."* And again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews; "Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment: and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed, but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."† Such were the essential glory, and majesty, and dignity of Jesus. He was Lord of Lords, and King of Kings; God over all, blessed for evermore. Let us bear this truth in our minds; and then consider,

Secondly, The *wonderful Humiliation* to which He willingly submitted. For high as He was exalted above all power and might, glorious in all uncreated excellence, He yet submitted to lay aside this Glory, this "form of God," and to take on himself "the form

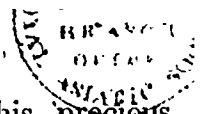
* Col. i. 16, 17. † Heb. i. 10, 11, 12.

of a servant." Astonishing to say, the Creator lowered himself to become a creature: the Almighty Lawgiver condescended to become subject to his own law. Nor did he take on him the nature of Angels. This would have been an extraordinary humiliation. But he sunk lower far: for he submitted to be made man; to become partaker of flesh and blood; to clothe himself with human nature; and not with human nature, as it first came out of its Maker's hands pure and perfect; but in its fallen and degraded state, subject to infirmities, disease, and death. Here was humiliation indeed! The Word made flesh! The Son of God making himself of no reputation, and found in fashion as a man! Let us consider,

Thirdly, *His sufferings as Man.* Was ever any sorrow like unto his sorrow? Was ever any one a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief, as He was? From the manger to the Cross, he was despised and rejected of men. "His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Through the whole of his ministry he was contradicted, reviled, hated, by those among whom He went about doing good. While he was seeking their happiness, they were plotting his destruction: and at length, with merciless hands, and mur-

derous hearts, they seized Him; brought Him to trial; falsely accused Him; clamorously demanded his blood, though the judge pronounced him to be innocent; got him to be unjustly condemned; mocked him; buffeted him; treated him with all possible indignity; and, in the end, barbarously and shamefully put him to death. Let us consider this holy, harmless, patient sufferer enduring all these things; "led as a sheep to the slaughter, as a lamb dumb before his shearers, not opening his mouth." — Let us recollect *who* He was; what glory and majesty were veiled beneath this persecuted form; and then call to mind,

Fourthly, *Why* he thus endured these sufferings. It was not from want of power to have prevented, or to have escaped them. He needed not to have come into this world, and to have exposed himself to all this indignity. His coming was altogether voluntary. He needed not to have yielded up himself into the hands of his enemies; for, by a word or a look, he might, in a moment, have destroyed them all. His sufferings were seen beforehand. They were willingly met by Him. And *why?* For *what* purpose? To *what* end? That by them He might save *us* from suffering: that by his obedience unto death, He might save us



from death eternal; that by his precious blood shedding, He might atone for our sins, reconcile us to God, and open to us the Kingdom of Heaven. This was the gracious purpose for which He humbled himself, suffered and died on the Cross; "that by his stripes we might be healed." Let us think, then,

Further, of the great, the surprising the amazing love, which filled his heart: love to poor, lost, miserable, guilty sinners! to those who were enemies to Him by wicked works; to those, who without his merciful interposition in their favour, must have perished for ever. But why need we speak of others? *We, we* who are *here present* were the objects of his compassionate love, in giving Himself to die for us. *We* are some of those unworthy sinners whom he came from heaven to save, and for whom he shed his precious blood. For our sakes he gave up Himself to Jews and Romans, to the High Priest and Pilate, that he might deliver our souls, and save us from going down into the pit. Have we ever seriously thought of these things? Have we ever seriously thought of the debt of love which we owe to Jesus for this his love to us? Have we ever seriously thought of the ungrateful return which we have made to Him for all

his mercies? How often, how long, how obstinately, have we taken part with his enemies, our sins and lusts, in opposition to Him; and have kept back from Him our heart, which is all He asks for all his mercies? Let us lay these things to mind. Let us think of our ingratitude in keeping our heart from Jesus, and in refusing to give up ourselves to Him, who gave up Himself for us. Let us think what will become of us, if we persist in rejecting his offers, and in neglecting his great salvation. Let us think how we shall be able to endure his presence, look Him in the face at his appearing; if we now perversely refuse to let Him reign over us, and ungratefully slight his tender love; that love, which now stands with open arms ready to receive us; that love, which, pointing to his bleeding side, and mangled limbs, now tenderly exclaims, 'This, sinner, I endured for thee. Wilt thou turn 'away from me, who for thee "hid not my 'face from shame and spitting?" Wilt 'thou prefer thy lusts to me; those lusts, 'which nailed me to the Cross? I am ready, '*even now*, after all *that thou hast done*, to 'receive thee graciously, to love thee freely. 'O, turn unto me, for I have redeemed 'thee. Come unto me, and I will give thee 'rest.' May every heart among us be en-

abled to say, 'Lord, help me to come.
'Henceforth I am not my own but thine.
'Show me what thou wouldst have me to
'do, and do with me according to thy
'will.'

SERMON III.

THE BROAD AND THE NARROW WAY.

ST. MATTHEW, vii. 13, 14.

Enter ye in at the strait Gate: for wide is the Gate and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.

THE Bible is given us to be "a light unto our feet, and a lamp unto our paths." But it is both sad and surprising to think how little use is in general made of the light thus vouchsafed to us. What numbers of persons are there, who pay no attention at all to the doctrines and precepts of Scripture, and are no more governed by the Bible, than if no such book was in being! How few, even among those who assent to the truths revealed, yet give any practical regard to them, or make any real and personal

application of them, to their own particular cases and circumstances! The passage in the text contains several very weighty truths, addressed to all, interesting to all, and level to the capacities and understandings of all. Yet how often are the words heard, or read, and none of those deep impressions made, which the hearing or reading of them ought to make! It shall be my endeavour, on the present occasion, to enforce these truths on our minds, and to lead us to use them in a profitable manner. — May the Lord bless the endeavour, and dispose our hearts to receive and apply the truths in question to our present and everlasting comfort! "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

The first great truth, of which, in these words of Christ Himself, we are reminded, is this; that there are but two states, in the one or in the other of which all mankind will, at length, be finally and for ever fixed; namely, a state of misery, and a state of happiness. Our Lord, in the text, describes the two states, by the words, *Destruction* and *Life*. He speaks of these two, and of these

two only. He says nothing of any third, or middle state. Those who enter not into *Life*, will fall into *Destruction.* The Scriptures, indeed, throughout agree in stating the same truth. They speak only of two things set before us, Life and Death. They mention only two places prepared to receive us, Heaven and Hell. They represent only two events, as awaiting us:—"He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: he that believeth not, shall be damned."* When the resurrection of the dead is spoken of, the same truth is still kept in view. There will be a "Resurrection of Life," and a "Resurrection of damnation." "Some will awake to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."† So in the account given of the aweful Day of Judgement, only two sorts of persons are spoken of, the sheep, and the goats: the one placed on the right hand of the Judge, the other on his left hand: "and these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."‡ But there is no occasion to multiply proofs on a point so clear as the truth before us. We can hardly read a chapter in the Bible without finding some additional confirmation of it. It is a truth

* Mark, xvi. 16. † John, v. 29. — Dan. xii. 2.
‡ Matt. xxv. 46.

to which we must all readily assent. We know it to be the declaration of Scripture, that all men must be either happy or miserable for ever. Let us then make a right use of the truth, which we thus admit. Let us bring it home to ourselves, to our own heart. Let us reflect how deeply we are concerned in it. Let us consider with ourselves, that there are but two ends, towards one of which we are daily travelling, *Destruction* and *Life*. Let us remember that there are but two States, in one of which we must be fixed; a State of torment, or a State of glory. Let us say to ourselves, every one of us to his own heart, 'I am here in this world, for a 'short, uncertain time: but I shall soon be 'removed into another world, where I shall 'remain for ever. Here I have a mixture 'of joys and sorrows. They are neither of 'them perfect in their kind, nor long in 'their continuance. The one frequently 'succeeds quickly to the other. My hap-'piness is oft-times suddenly turned into 'grief: while, on the other hand, though 'heaviness may endure for the night, yet, 'not seldom, joy cometh in the morning. 'But in the world to come things will not 'be so. There I shall be either completely 'miserable, or completely happy. There I 'shall have either bliss without any torment,

'or torment without any bliss. There, too, 'I shall be fixed for ever. No change, no 'end will ever take place. My bliss or my 'torment will be eternal. If I am happy, 'I shall be happy for ever. If I am miser-'able, I shall be miserable through eter-'nity. One of these must be my State: 'and now soon, how very soon, it may begin, 'I know not.'

The second Truth of which we are reminded in the text, is this; that as there are but two states, in the one, or in the other of which we shall finally be fixed, so there are but two ways, in the one, or in the other of which we are *now* walking: and these two ways most certainly and directly lead to their respective ends. Our Saviour speaks of the way that leadeth to Destruction, and of the way that leadeth unto Life. Those who are walking in the way of destruction, if they persist in this way, will assuredly arrive at destruction: while such as are walking in the way of life, if they go on in this way, will as assuredly attain eternal life. The way, in which they walk, will bring them to the end to which it leads. As they have sown, so shall they reap. Their end shall be according to the way which they have chosen. Whatever difference, then, there may now be found to

exist among mankind; however they may now be distinguished from each other by rank, by station, by talents, by fortune, by learning, or, in short, by any thing by which one person can be distinguished from another; yet they all in fact are separable into two great classes; those who are in the Way to Destruction, and those who are in the Way to Life. This is a distinction which swallows up every other. Among the immense multitudes of persons, who are in the world, there are but these two sorts. Is not such, also, the general language and representation of Scripture? Does it not speak only of the just and the unjust; of the righteous and the unrighteous, of the godly and the ungodly, of believers and unbelievers, of those who serve God and of those who serve Him not? Does it not describe all men, as being either children of wrath, or children of grace; subjects of Satan, or subjects of Christ; heirs of hell, or heirs of Heaven? Let us then lay this Truth also to heart. Let us apply it, every one, to our own case. Let us say to ourselves, 'I belong to one of these two descriptions of persons. I am at this moment 'in the way either to heaven or to hell. 'According as the path, in which I am now 'walking, leads to the one or to the other

'of these places, so surely, if persisted in, 'it will bring me thither. Life and death 'are now proposed to me; a blessing and a 'curse. Two ways are set before me, each 'of which leads to its respective end. I 'have already entered on one of them. 'Every day I am going on towards the end 'to which it leads. Every day I am either 'laying up for myself treasures in heaven, or 'am treasuring up for myself wrath against 'the day of wrath.' Surely this Truth, if thus applied to the mind, must suggest an anxious enquiry as to *which* of these two things *we* are doing. Can we seriously say to ourselves, 'I am every day advancing, 'either in the Way to Destruction, or in the 'Way to Life,' and not be stirred up earnestly to ask, 'Which of these two ways am 'I following?' Surely it is impossible but that we must wish to have this question answered. The Truths then remaining to be noticed, will help us to answer it. They relate to these two different ways; and by showing us what they are, may lead to discover in which of them we are at present walking.

The Way of Destruction is the first described in the text; and there are three particulars mentioned respecting it.

1. The Gate into it is wide.

There is no difficulty in entering on the

Way which leadeth to Destruction. There is nothing which opposes our setting out on this road. No act of self-denial is required; no force need be put upon ourselves; no labour, no constraint is necessary to enable us to take this way. On the contrary, it is the way which, when left to ourselves, we *naturally* choose. It is the way to which our own corrupt inclinations of themselves lead us. Under their influence, we are carried, as it were, at once into the Way of Destruction. In fact, we may be said to pass the threshold as soon as we are born: for we are born in sin, and are the children of wrath; and no sooner do our depraved dispositions begin to show themselves, but it is plain through what gate we have entered, and in what way we are walking.

2. The way itself is broad. This is another particular in the description here set before us. "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction." There is ample space in this road, for every one who walks in it. Wide as the gate may be to admit all who come to it; equally *broad* is the way to furnish them with room for their journey. There may be many different tracks along this road, and a man may turn out of one into another; but they all lead to the same point. They will all alike conduct those

who walk in them to endless misery. The expression, indeed, in the text, may imply something more than this. It may imply, not only that there is room enough for all who walk in this way, but that there is no trouble, no difficulty, in walking in it. The way itself is plain, and smooth, and level, cleared of every obstacle, free from all interruption, very pleasant to the eye and to the feet. As men find no difficulty in entering on the Way of Destruction, so they find no difficulty in pursuing it. The way is easy and agreeable to them, suited to their depraved capacities, and sinful inclinations.

3. It is the Way along which the great bulk of mankind are travelling. "Many there be which go in thereat." The gate is wide; the road is broad; and multitudes are walking in it. This is another particular which distinguishes the way, of which we are speaking. It might be naturally expected, that a way so easily entered on, and so readily followed, would be trodden by numbers. It might be reasonably expected, since all men are born in sin, and love the pleasures of sin, that they would, for the most part, be found in the Way of Destruction. What then, in other words, is this Way, but the way of the world? Who

are those that are walking in it, but those who are walking after the course of this present evil world; who, on every side, are eagerly following their different pursuits of pleasure and interest, of ease or honour; who by their numbers keep one another in countenance, and encourage one another in their forgetfulness of God, and in their love of the Creature before the Creator?

We come next to consider what is said of the Way of Life: and we find, that in every particular, it is the very opposite of the Way of Destruction.

In the first place, The Gate into it is *strait*. There is great difficulty in entering on the way that leadeth unto life. There are many obstacles to oppose our entrance on this way. Much labour, and striving, and self-denial are requisite before we can even begin to walk in it. It is not a way which we naturally choose; for it is in fact directly opposed to all our natural desires and inclinations. Before a man can enter on it, there are many things with which he must contend, both in himself and from others. Inward and outward temptations unite to resist him, and to prevent his entrance; pride, unbelief, the flesh, the world, and the devil, all join to oppose and stop him. These things make the gate strait.

They make it a difficult thing for a man to get through this gate; and to set out on the way which leadeth unto life.

Secondly, The Way itself is narrow. In the broad way of destruction, there may be many paths, but in the way of life there is but one. In this way there is no turning to the right hand or to the left. Those who walk in it must go straight forward, nor suffer their feet to wander out of the line of duty. The expression, indeed, in the text, may mean something more than this. As the expression of the Way of Destruction being *broad* might be intended to denote the easiness with which it is travelled, and the few obstacles which are to be found in it; so the expression of the way being *narrow*, may have respect to the difficulties with which a progress in it is attended. It may mean that it is a way hard to be trodden, uneven, steep, and thorny. It may imply, that as men find it difficult to enter on this way, so they find it difficult to walk in it. Many obstacles oppose their passage; many incumbrances impede it. Many sacrifices are to be made: many hardships are to be endured: much watchfulness is to be exercised: many enemies are to be overcome.

Thirdly, The Way of Life is a way little travelled. "Few there be that find it."

Unlike to the broad way, along which such multitudes are walking, in this narrow way but few pilgrims are to be found: as the Prophet expresses it, "One of a city and two of a family." Such hitherto has been the case with the Way of Life. *Few* have been those who have found it. At the time of the flood, out of all the millions who lived upon the earth, Noah only, and some few of his family, were walking in this Way. Out of the many thousand inhabitants in Sodom, Lot was the only person who was found in this way. In the whole nation of Israel, at the time of Elijah the prophet, but seven thousand were to be met with, who were not walking in the broad road of destruction. In the days of Christ and of his Apostles, how few were prevailed on by their ministry, to enter in at the strait gate! And so it has been ever since. The real followers of Jesus Christ, those who are walking in the narrow way, have always been, as he himself called them, a "little flock," few in number, compared with the multitudes that are thronging the broad and beaten road.

Such, then, are the particulars which the text sets before us respecting *these two Ways*, of which it speaks. Having considered these particulars, we shall now perhaps be

better able to judge in which of these ways we are walking, and, consequently, to what end we are advancing. Let us have recourse to self-examination, and put the following questions to ourselves: —

'Is the way in which I am walking the 'Way of the world, the Way of the multitude? 'Am I doing as others do? Am I following 'their customs, and maxims, and fashions, 'acting on their principles, and led by their 'example? Or have I left this Way? Am I 'no longer following the multitude in do-'ing evil? Have I separated myself from 'them? Once I was walking as others 'walk, in the broad way; have I now en-'tered in at the strait gate? Once I was 'swimming down the stream with the rest 'of the world; am I now turned about, 'and am I trying to swim against it? 'Am I sensible of the difficulty which 'I found in first making this attempt? 'Am I conscious how much I had to 'struggle with from within and from with-'out? Did my worldly friends and worldly 'interests oppose my entrance? Did my 'own corrupt heart resist my endeavours, 'and try to keep me back? Do I now 'find continual difficulty in following this 'narrow way? Do I perceive it to be a 'narrow way? And, notwithstanding these

'things, do I really walk in it? Do I take 'God's word for my rule? Do I humbly 'strive to obey his commands in all things? 'Do I live in constant dependence on his 'promises of help and strength? Relying 'on these promises, do I resist the motions 'of sin in my heart, as well as renounce the 'practice of it in my life? Do I habitually 'deny myself, my own corrupt desires, and 'evil inclinations? Do I daily take up my 'cross and follow Christ? Do I allow 'myself in nothing, which the Bible and 'my conscience tell me is wrong? Would 'I rather suffer injury, or loss, than commit 'sin? Is my hope in heaven? Am I 'looking for happiness *there* and not *here?* 'Do I trust in Jesus Christ, to give me 'this happiness and to prepare me for it?' What says conscience to these questions? Does it say to us, 'Thou knowest nothing, 'feelest nothing, doest nothing of these 'things, which belong to the strait gate, 'and the narrow way? Thou art still in 'the broad road!' O, listen to the faithful monitor! Remember the broad way is the Way of destruction. Stay then no longer in it. Come out, and be separate. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Strive and you shall enter. The time past may suffice to have walked in the road of sin and

death. Henceforth walk in the way of life, the way of pleasantness and peace. Do you hope that you are already in this way? Pray to the Lord to keep you in it. Strive earnestly to follow it. "He that endureth unto the end shall be saved: but if any man draw back, my soul (saith the Lord) shall have no pleasure in him."

SERMON IV.

THE REAL CAUSE OF MEN'S REJECTION OF THE GOSPEL, STATED AND ILLUSTRATED.

ST. JOHN, v. 40.

And Ye will not come to Me, that Ye might have Life.

THERE is no truth more plainly taught in Scripture than this, that while man's Salvation is entirely of God's grace and mercy, his ruin is altogether of himself. If he perish, it will be his own fault, and he will have no one but himself to blame. Wherever the Gospel of Christ comes, it freely invites all to accept the blessings which it brings. Whether men will be the better for the invitation, depends on the reception which they give to it. If they are willing to receive it, and consent to the terms proposed, the blessing will be theirs; but if they refuse, and are disobedient, it will be justly withheld from them.

This statement fully accords with that given in the text. "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." This was the complaint which our Saviour made of the Jews to whom he speaks. By coming to *Him* they might have life. He invited them to come to Him. The Scriptures, which they professed to believe, directed them to come to Him. But, alas! *they would not.* They would neither accept the invitations, nor follow the directions given to them. They refused to come to Him, through whom alone they could obtain eternal life; and the plain and necessary consequence of persisting in this refusal must be, that they would perish without remedy.

In order to a profitable consideration of this subject, let us advert to two points here set before us.

I. The blessed Consequence of coming to Christ.

II. The Reason, which prevents men from coming to Him.

I. In adverting to the blessed Consequence of coming to Christ, let us begin with calling to mind what is meant by this expression. On comparing the several passages in which our Saviour speaks of *coming to Him*, it seems clear, that by this expression

he intends in general to describe our becoming true Christians, his real disciples and followers, believers in Him, and devoted to his service. To come to him is to renounce all other lords and masters, and to take Him alone for our Prophet, Priest, and King. It is to trust wholly to the merits of his death and righteousness for our pardon and acceptance with God; to rely solely on his Spirit to teach and sanctify us; to walk in obedience to his commands; and for his sake to take up our cross daily, to deny ourselves, and to follow his steps. In a word, to come to Christ is to believe in Him with the heart, and to confess Him in the life; to commit our souls, with all our dearest interests, into his care and keeping, as Noah entrusted himself and all he held dear to the care and keeping of the ark; and to live the life, which we now live in the flesh, by faith in the Son of God.—This is what is meant by coming to Christ. And the blessed Consequence of thus coming to Him is, that we "have Life." All who do not come to Christ, will surely die. They will die in their sins; and so dying, they will endure the bitter pains of eternal death. But they who come to Christ, shall live: they shall never be overcome of the second death; they shall live

for ever; they shall have everlasting life. Are not such the express declarations of Scripture on this important point? "He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." "This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life." "He that hath the Son, hath life." "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life." "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "Because I live, ye shall live also."* Such, in general, is the blessed Consequence of coming to Christ. They who now come to Him, shall hereafter live with him. He "will raise them up at the last day." He will then say to them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you:" and He will take them with Himself to heaven, to see his glory, and to share his happiness for ever and ever.

But godliness has the promise *of* the life that now is, as well as of that which is to

* John, xi. 25, 26. — 1 John, ii. 12. v. 12. — John, iii. 36. x. 10. 27, 28. xiv. 19.

come! and this then is a part of the blessed Consequence of coming to Christ. Those who come to Him, even now "have life." They have privileges and consolations peculiar to themselves: they have hopes and joys, which other people have not, and to which they themselves, before they came to Him, were strangers. They have peace and reconciliation with God. Their sins are pardoned: their persons are justified. They may look up to God, as to a compassionate and loving Father, and may see his hand directing and controlling all events for their spiritual and everlasting good. They have many precious promises, on which they may confidently rely in every time of need. They are made partakers of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter: through whose gracious influences on the soul, they even now at times have a taste, and an earnest of the happiness reserved for them in heaven. They find the blessed work of the Spirit in their hearts, subduing their corruptions, weaning their affections from the world, putting into them good desires, and holy resolutions, and making them more meet and fitted for the inheritance of the Saints in light. They are privileged, and in general are enabled to live with heaven in their eye; to look at death without fear,

and beyond it with hope; and amidst all the troubles and sufferings of this present life, to endure with patience, and to rejoice in prospect of the glory of God. — Thus, compared with those who are still dead in trespasses and sins, they even now "have life." They here live unto God; and thus living, they know by experience the blessed Consequence of having come to Christ. May we not appeal to many witnesses, for the truth of this description? Are there not many, who will testify to the correctness of this representation? Many who are ready to own, that since they came to Christ, they have felt in their hearts a peace, a comfort, a joy, which they felt not before: who are sensible that a great, a happy, a blessed change has taken place in their hearts; who by their own experience can tell the meaning of those expressive words, "Whoso findeth me, findeth life." * But why do not all of us find, and know, and feel these things? Why do not all of us, since all are invited, partake of the blessedness of which we have been speaking? Why do not all of us come to Christ that we may have life? To give an answer to these questions, will necessarily lead us to the second point to which we proposed to advert.

* Proverbs, viii. 35

II. The Reason which prevents men from coming to Christ.

Our Saviour has himself assigned the Reason in the text. He says to the Jews, who did not receive and welcome Him as the Christ; "Ye *will* not come to me, that ye might have life." They did not come to Christ for life. And why? Because they were not able to come? No: But because they were not willing. Here lies men's real inability to come to Christ. Here is the true reason which prevents them from coming to Him. They have no inclination to come. They have no mind to come. There is another passage of Scripture, in which our Lord gives the same view of the case. In that tender lamentation, which he utters over the Jewish nation at the prospect of those heavy calamities which were coming upon them, observe how he speaks of these calamities, as the consequence of their wilful and obstinate rejection of Himself. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; and ye *would not!*" * This was the obstacle, the only obstacle, which had prevented them

* Matt. xxiii. 37.

from coming to Christ, and from being saved by Him; *they would not.* And with this view the Scriptures uniformly agree. They represent, throughout, a *willing mind,* as the one grand and indispensable requisite for embracing the Gospel; and thus, by consequence, imply, that an unwilling mind is the one great cause of our rejecting it. "If ye be willing and obedient, (says the Prophet), ye shall eat the good of the land." "Let him that is athirst come (says Christ himself), and whosoever *will* let him take of the water of life freely." * How often do we find true religion represented as a deliberate act of the will, influencing the mind, and leading a man to prefer and select the service of God, as the voluntary object of his choice. Thus Joshua said to the Jews, "*Choose* you this day whom ye will serve."

Thus David said, "I have *chosen* the way of truth." And thus also it is said of Mary, who sat at the feet of Jesus in preference to every other employment, that she "had *chosen* the better part." † In fact, the will is a man's self; it is his heart; and, consequently, till he be *willing* to come to Christ, he cannot really come to Him; for he does not come with the heart. True conversion

* Isaiah, i. 19. — Rev. xxii. 17.

† Joshua, xxiv. 15. — Psalm cxix. 30. — Luke, x. 42.

is the turning of the will to God; and till this be done, nothing else, however fair and promising its appearance may be, will really avail. The understanding may be enlightened, the conscience may be alarmed, the judgement may be convinced; but if the will be not changed and turned, there is, there can be, no true religion in the heart. Balaam, the Prophet, had an enlightened understanding in the things of God. He describes himself as "the man whose eyes were opened; who heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High:" yea, he was enabled even to speak of Christ in these prophetic words: "I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not nigh; there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel:" and so clearly did he discern the happiness of Christ's people, that he passionately uttered this remarkable wish: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" * But what did his knowledge or his wishes profit him? He lived a wicked life, and died a miserable death, the just reward of his iniquity; for while his understanding was enlightened to see and appreciate the value of religion, his heart was not disposed to embrace and practise it. He

* Numb. xxiii. 10. — xxiv. 3, 4. 17.

"*would* not come to Christ, that he might have life." — The like was the case with the Roman governor Felix. The faithful preaching of St. Paul alarmed his conscience. When the Apostle "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come," Felix could not suppress or conceal his fears. So great was his terror, that he even "trembled."* Yet what did his emotions profit him? He was terrified; he trembled; but he was not converted. The conscience was roused; but the *will* was not changed. He had no mind to give way to his impressions, and to embrace the Gospel. — The case of King Agrippa is another illustration of the same truth. When the Apostle preached the Gospel to him, his judgement was convinced; he felt the force of the Apostle's arguments. He seems also in some way to have betrayed his inward conviction of the truth; for we find St. Paul addressing him thus: "King Agrippa, believest thou the Prophets? I know that thou believest." To which Agrippa answered, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."† But here he stopped. He was convinced. He was almost persuaded; but he was not converted. And what was the reason? His *will* was not consenting. He "*would* not

* Acts, xxiv. 25. † Acts, xxvi. 27, 28.

come to Christ, that he might have life." Let these examples help to explain the present subject, and lead us to look into our own hearts. Our understanding may have been enlightened. We may have a clearer view of religious truth than we once had. Like Balaam, our eyes may have been opened. We may hear the words of God, and may know the knowledge of the Most High. We may earnestly wish to die the death of the righteous, and to have our last end like theirs. Or, possibly, our conscience may have been awakened. Under the preaching of God's word, we may have felt some fears for our soul. An apprehension of our guilt and danger may have alarmed us; nay, like Felix, we may have "trembled" at the thoughts of a judgement to come. Or, perhaps, we may have been deeply and thoroughly convinced of the importance and excellence of religion. Our judgement may have decidedly agreed with the representations given of it in the word of God. With Agrippa, we may have felt the force of divine truth, and may have been almost persuaded to be Christians. But are we quite persuaded? With all this enlightening in our understanding, and alarm in our conscience, and conviction in our judgement, is our *will* also turned? Do we heartily

assent to the terms of the Gospel? have we cordially embraced them? This is the point for our serious examination. Are we *willing* to come to Christ, that we may have life? If we do not come to Him, we have seen what it is that prevents us. We *will* not come. And let us further observe from whence this our unwillingness arises. It arises from the natural enmity of the heart to God. It arises from a cause, perhaps hitherto unknown to, and even unsuspected by, ourselves, from our dislike to the holy and humbling commands of the Gospel; and from our secretly loving some earthly, worldly, sensual object, better than that heavenly, eternal life, which Christ offers to bestow on us. Look again at those examples before noticed. Why was Balaam *unwilling* to do what his enlightened understanding showed him that he ought to do? Why, when so desirous to die the death of the righteous, was he so averse to live the life of the righteous? Because he loved the wages of unrighteousness. His heart ran eagerly after its covetousness. Money was his idol. The love of gain had possession of his soul, and kept him back from God. He could not find in his heart to renounce his worldly prospects for the sake of the Divine favour, and the happiness of

heaven. So *he* would not come. — What was the case with Felix? How came it to pass that he resisted the motions of God's Spirit on his heart, and refused to come? He was a sensual, licentious man. He lived in the gratification of fleshly lusts. He knew, that if he came to Christ, he must deny and mortify these. He must live a sober, righteous, and godly life. But this he had no mind to do. Greatly as he was terrified, he could not bring himself to give up his wicked pleasures. And so *he* would not come. — Enquire next of Agrippa the cause of his unwillingness to become a Christian. Why did he refuse to give way to his convictions? Agrippa was one of the great men of the earth. He was fond of power and applause. These things lay nearest to his heart. He "loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." How then could he *consent* to come to Christ? The consequences of such a step would have been disgrace and infamy. By taking it, he would have reduced himself to the same level with the poor persecuted prisoner who stood before him; for Paul's only crime was being a Christian. Pride therefore forbad Agrippa to give way. While this principle ruled in his heart, it was impossible that he could willingly come to

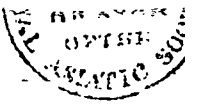
Christ. To adopt our Saviour's remark in connection with the text, "How could he believe who received honour from men, and sought not the honour that cometh from God only?" We see, then, in all these persons, what made them so unwilling to embrace true religion. They all secretly loved something, the love of which was contrary to true religion. And let us be assured, that if we come not to Christ, the case is the same with us. We have some idol in our heart, however little we may suspect it, which will not let us cordially embrace the Gospel. There is some favourite indulgence, some beloved lust, some besetting sin, with which we are not willing to part; and which a sincere consent to the Gospel would compel us to renounce. Hence arises our unwillingness to come to Christ. Let us search the matter to the bottom, and we shall find it so. And may we not only discover what it is, which keeps our heart from Christ, but may we also have power to subdue and overcome it! For let us consider, till we have come to Him, till we have really embraced the Gospel, and are sincerely practising it, how great is our misery, and how great is our sin!

Our *misery* is great, for *we have not life.* Not having come to Christ, we are still in a

state of death. We are still under the sentence of eternal death: still dead in trespasses and sins; without pardon and without holiness; having no title to a heavenly life, nor any fitness for it. As Christ said to the unbelieving Jews, "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins;" so it must be said to us, "If ye come not to Christ, ye shall die in your sins." And what then will our idols profit us? What good will those things do us, which we have preferred to Christ; and for the sake of which, we would not come to Him? Let us sit down and count our cost. Let us think how we shall feel, and what we shall wish, when we shall find that these sinful attachments, which have here kept us from Christ, have also kept us from heaven; nay, have brought us to that dreadful place of punishment, to which we shall be deservedly assigned, and from which we shall never be released.

For let us consider further, the *great sin* of not coming to Jesus Christ. He came down from Heaven on purpose that we might have life; and *ought* we not to come to Him for it? He denied himself, he bore his cross, he died, that we might live. And *ought we* not to deny ourselves, to bear our cross, to die unto sin, that we may please

and live unto Him? Had He been unwilling to undergo these sufferings for our sake, our state would have been most deplorable; our souls must have perished for ever without hope. And can we be unwilling to undergo what He imposes on us? Let us reflect on the ingratitude of such a conduct. What could He have done more to show his love, and to win and merit ours, than to have shed His own blood to save us from death? Can we listen, without being deeply moved, to this tender complaint? "After all that I have done, after all that I have suffered for your sakes, you will not come to me, that you may have life." May the heart of stone be taken away! May the Lord make us willing in the day of his power? May we have grace to come to Him! Let us call to mind his merciful invitation; "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Let us be persuaded, let us be prevailed on, to come unto Him. We need not fear being rejected: for He who laments our unwillingness to come, has also said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."



SERMON V.

DIVINE FORBEARANCE TOWARDS SINNERS.

HOSEA, xi. 8, 9.

How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger: I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man.

THE long-suffering of God, his patience towards sinners, his unwillingness to punish, his readiness to pardon, form a conspicuous part of the divine character, as set forth to our view in the sacred writings. The Bible abounds with representations of these gracious qualities in the Almighty. But perhaps there is no single passage which exhibits them in a more striking, beautiful, or interesting light than the text. It de-

scribes, as it were, a strong and tender struggle in the mind of God between the opposite and contending claims of Justice and Mercy; and in the end represents the latter as prevailing, mercy rejoicing against judgement. We are not indeed to suppose, that such a struggle as is here described ever really takes place in the Divine mind. God is not subject to such conflicts. With Him "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." But He is pleased, in gracious condescension to our capacities, thus to describe Himself to us; and in the view which He gives us of his own perfections, oftentimes to speak after the manner of men, that we may be enabled to form the clearer notions on the subject.

With the design of afterwards drawing from the text some profitable reflections, I shall first lead you to a more particular consideration of it.

The nation of Israel, or Ephraim (as it was frequently called by the Prophets), had done every thing to provoke the Lord to anger. Forgetful of all that He had wrought for them, and of all which they owed to Him, they had left his service, renounced his worship, and had given themselves up to the most shameful idolatries. And they had continued long in this state. Mercies

and judgements had been employed, but in vain, to reclaim them. They still continued impenitent. In the very verse before the text, the Lord had complained of them, as being "bent to backslide from Him:" though they were called to Him, yet "would they not exalt him." Now what could be expected but that they should be dealt with according to their deserts? After such a complaint, what could be looked for, but a declaration of judgement? What should the Lord add but such language as this, 'Therefore I am determined to punish them, and 'never to show them mercy any more?' But no:—such is the sovereignty of his mercy, such the freeness, the fulness of Divine grace, that it immediately follows, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger: I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man."

Now in these words let us first attend to the debate which is represented between Justice and Mercy: the gracious debate, which God is described as holding with Himself concerning Israel's case. What

Justice would propose is plainly here implied. It would say thus: 'Let Ephraim 'be given up Let him be given up to ruin, 'as an incorrigible son is given up to be dis-'inherited, or an incurable patient is given 'over by his physicians. Let Israel be 'delivered, delivered to the hands of the 'enemy, as a lamb to the lion, to be torn in 'pieces and devoured. Let him be made 'as Admah; let him be set as Zeboim: 'the two cities which, together with So-'dom and Gomorrah, were destroyed by 'fire out of heaven. Let him be utterly 'and irreparably ruined, and be made 'like these cities in desolation, as he 'has made himself like them in sin and 'wickedness. He deserves to be thus aban-'doned, and the Almighty in dealing thus 'with him will do him no wrong!' — Such are the proposals of Justice. Attend next to the opposition which Mercy makes to these proposals. 'How shall I do this? 'How shall I cast off my poor untoward 'son? He is indeed untoward, but he is 'still my son. He was once "a dear son, 'a pleasant child:" and *how* can I give him 'up? He deserves indeed nothing less. 'He is ripe for ruin; judgements stand 'ready to fall on him. Nothing is wanting 'but my giving him up. The enemy is

'ready to seize and devour him. If I de-
'liver him into their hands, I do no more
'than is just. But *how* can I do it? *How*
'can I find in my heart to destroy him?
'Peradventure if I spare him a little longer,
'he may yet repent, and reform, and re-
'turn to his duty. How then can I give
'him up?' — Thus Mercy pleads; nor does she plead in vain. The Lord describes himself as graciously relenting at the mention of these severe proceedings. "Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together." I cannot go on to execute the judgements which I had purposed to bring on this devoted people. My bowels are troubled for them. I cannot find in my heart to consume them.

Observe next the determination of this debate. After a long struggle between Mercy and Justice, Mercy prevails. It is decreed that the reprieve shall be lengthened out still. "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger: I will not return to destroy Ephraim." That is, 'I will not do these 'things *now*. I will spare him a little 'longer. Though I am angry with him; 'though he shall not go utterly unpu-'nished; yet I will not suffer my whole 'displeasure to arise. I will mitigate the 'sentence; I will abate the rigour of it.

'I will not make a full end of him. I will 'correct, but in judgement, not in anger, 'lest I bring him to nothing. I will chastise, 'but not consume him.'

Take notice, in the last place, of the ground and reason of this determination: "for I am God, and not man."—Had it been a man, whom Ephraim had thus grievously offended, he would not, he could not have borne it: his passion would have overpowered his mercy; and he would surely have executed the fierceness of his anger. But "I am God, and not man." God knows how to restrain, to moderate his anger. "His mercy endureth for ever." Besides, were a man ever so disposed to show mercy to an offender, he might find it difficult to do it. He might not know how to reconcile the contending claims of Justice and Mercy. He might be at a loss to compromise the matter between them, to be at the same time both just and merciful. But He who is God and not man, could overcome this difficulty. He could find an expedient to secure the honour of his Justice, and yet to advance the honour of his Mercy. He could discover a way of being a just God, and yet a Saviour. Therefore he would show mercy to Ephraim. He would not execute upon him the fierceness

of his wrath: for He was God, and not man. As in other things, so in pardoning sin, and sparing sinners, "God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways. For, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts."

Having thus led you to a more particular consideration of the text, I shall now endeavour to draw from it some profitable reflections.

I. How exactly does the view here given of the Divine mercy and forbearance, in this particular instance, agree with the general representations of them in Scripture! In the times before the Flood, how remarkably did the same gracious qualities shine forth! The wickedness of the world was so great, as loudly to call for Divine vengeance and exemplary judgement. We are expressly told, that "the earth was corrupted before God," and that "it was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth; and behold it was corrupt: for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth; and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man, whom I have created, from off the face of the earth, both man and beast; for it

repenteth me that I have made them." This was the language of Justice. But Mercy here also interceded, and prayed for a respite. Though such were the corruptions, such the provocations of man; though Justice required his destruction; "*Yet* (saith the Lord in great compassion), *yet* his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." 'This further space shall be 'granted, to see if he will return and seek 'after God.'

How signally, in like manner, did Divine Mercy interfere, and repeatedly spare the people of Israel in the wilderness! "They remembered not the multitude of his mercies, but provoked him at the sea, even the Red Sea. Nevertheless He saved them for his name's sake; that he might make his mighty power to be known." "But they soon forgat his words; they waited not for his counsel. They lusted exceedingly in the wilderness; they tempted God in the desert. They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass, and forgat God their Saviour. Therefore he said that he would destroy them." But he could not find in his heart to do it. How should he make them as Admah or Zeboim? "He

regarded their afflictions when he heard their cry. He remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies."

But to omit other individual instances, how eminently do the compassion and forbearance of the Almighty appear in that great work of his Mercy, the Spiritual Redemption of man! The long-suffering shown at particular times or to particular nations or persons, is but a specimen and a part of that general long-suffering which He has shown, and still continues to show, to the whole race of mankind. The wickedness of the old world, and the corruptions and provocation of Israel and Ephraim, are but a picture and representation of human nature in general. All flesh has corrupted its way before God. When he looks down from heaven upon the children of men, he sees that there is "none righteous; no, not one:" that "every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually." The history of the world is but a history of man's rebellion against his Maker. Men are still living without God in the world, serving divers lusts and pleasures, following the devices and desires of their own evil hearts, and making gods of their earthly possessions, or their favourite pur-

suits. The earth is still filled with violence; the lips which were made to bless the Lord are continually employed to speak against Him, to blaspheme his name, to murmur at his providence, and even to deny his authority. The hands, the feet, the eyes, which were created to serve and glorify Him, are continually used as instruments of unrighteousness and sin. Is not this now the state of the world? Does it not lie in wickedness? What then does Justice require, but that the world should be punished for its guilt? What does it call upon God to do, but to destroy the world? But has the Almighty acted thus? Has he complied with the strict demands of justice? No, He has not found in his heart to do it. 'How 'can I give them up? How can I deliver 'them over at once to destruction? True, 'they deserve that I should thus deal with 'them. Their provocations are great. I 'should be just in condemning them. But 'mine heart is turned within me: my re-'pentings are kindled together. I desire not 'the death of these sinners, but that they 'should turn and live. There is indeed a 'difficulty in pardoning them, lest in show-'ing mercy to them, I should seem to en-'courage sin, or appear less than infinitely 'just and holy. But I can overcome that

'difficulty. I am God and not man. I 'can provide a way of magnifying my 'mercy without impeaching my justice. I 'can find a ransom for sinners, a satisfac-'tion for their sins; which, while it shews 'the honour I put upon my law, shall fill 'heaven itself with wonder and admiration. 'I will send my only-begotten Son into the 'world. I will give Him to be a sacrifice 'for these poor sinners. He shall take upon 'Him their nature. He shall suffer and die 'in their stead. I will lay on Him the 'iniquity of them all. I will set Him forth 'as a propitiation for the remission of sins. 'I will expose Him, hanging on the cross, 'as a spectacle to men and angels. There 'they shall see at once displayed my in-'flexible justice, my unsullied holiness, my 'unsearchable wisdom, my unfathomable 'mercy. Here shall a way be opened for 'the recovery and salvation of this wicked 'world. I will proclaim pardon and peace 'to every one of these miserable sinners, 'who will accept of the sacrifice which 'I have thus provided for his sins; who, 'trusting to it for forgiveness, will return to 'me with a penitent heart, and will grate-'fully give himself up to live henceforth 'to my service, and to be sanctified by my 'Spirit, which I will send him. Thus shall

'Mercy rejoice against Judgement. Thus 'may the chief of sinners be saved. Thus, 'none, notwithstanding their transgressions 'which are past, shall perish, except by 'persisting in their rebellion, and rejecting 'these offers of peace and pardon.'

Such is the representation which Redemption gives us of the mercy and forbearance of the Almighty. Rather than sinners, than rebels, should perish without remedy, without hope, under the righteous sentence of his law, He spared not his own Son; but gave him up for them all. He was pleased to bruise Him, and to make his soul an offering for sin. How does this transaction throw light on the declaration in the text! What views does it unfold to us of the depth of the riches of Divine Grace!

II. How greatly do these views increase and aggravate the sinfulness of sin! Sin, in many respects, is exceeding sinful. It is *rebellion* against a just and rightful Sovereign. It is *robbery* committed against a good and a gracious Master. It is *ingratitude* to a most kind and bountiful friend and benefactor. But, in addition to all these aggravating circumstances, sin is despite done to the richest mercy and tenderest compassion. Here its exceeding sinfulness most strikingly appears. If God were not so

very merciful, sin would not be so exceeding sinful. Great as Ephraim's guilt had been, do we not see that it would be immensely increased, if, after the Divine Relenting towards him, he should still persist in sinning against God? How great then must be the guilt of those who disregard the mercy offered in the Gospel! who taking no notice, or at least no adequate notice of what God has done to save them, of the tender yearning of his bowels towards them, of the inestimable sacrifice which he has provided for their sins, still live in rebellion against Him; refuse to return to their duty, and presumptuously harden their hearts against Him! My brethren, lay this matter seriously to heart. You, whose consciences testify, that you have not yet made your peace with God according to his Gospel, nor are living as the redeemed of the Lord should live, in all holy conversation and godliness: You cannot but know that you ought to do these things, but you do them not. Perhaps you intend to do them; but not yet. You mean to turn to God hereafter; but at present you are not ready. O, trust not to such a deceitful, such a presumptuous thought. The Divine Mercy, great as we have seen it to be, will not always be offered to impenitent sinners.

Though God did not *then* execute upon Ephraim the fierceness of his anger, though He *then* spared him; yet it was only for a time. When that time was over, and no amendment had taken place, then he returned and destroyed him utterly. Was it not thus with the people before the flood? A reprieve was granted to them for the space of an hundred and twenty years; but when at the end of this period, they still continued impenitent, the flood came and destroyed them all. Was it not thus with Israel in the wilderness? The Lord bore with them for a season: but at length, in the day of provocation, He sware in his wrath, that they should never enter into his rest. Profit by these examples. They are written for your admonition. By impenitence and despite to the Divine Mercy, tempt not the Lord to cut you off in your sins, and to seal you to destruction. He is not willing that any should perish. Then provoke Him not to wrath. Rather lay hold of his mercy. "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

III. What great encouragement does the subject before us give to every humbled and penitent sinner! Such are apt to be full of doubts and fears. The very sense which they have of their sins, the very

sorrow which they feel on account of them, the very conflict which they maintain against them, are apt to put distressing thoughts into their minds, and lead them to question their claim to mercy. Their earnest desire is to have peace with God through Jesus Christ. They see their need of his salvation. They admire the wisdom of it. They long for nothing more than an interest in it. But they distrust their title to it. They fear that God will not include them in it. They cry for mercy, but cannot believe that they shall find it. Now to such the text holds out great consolation. Was God so unwilling to give up even *impenitent* Ephraim? Was He so backward in delivering up Israel to punishment, even when Israel sought not deliverance? And will He be unwilling to receive and pardon *penitent* offenders? Will He be backward in shewing mercy to them that seek it? Could He not find it in his heart to destroy those who were going on still in their wickedness? And will He find it in his heart to be unmerciful to such as are striving to renounce their sins, and are anxiously desirous of walking in newness of life? Consider how unreasonable is such a supposition. Surely, if you are seeking God in your heart, condemning yourself, and imploring his mercy,

surely his bowels are yearning over you. He sees you with delight. He feels for you the tenderest pity. He will meet you with loving-kindness. Surely He is saying to every person of this description, 'O, thou 'afflicted and contrite soul, be of good 'cheer; mine anger is turned away. I can 'never give thee up, nor deliver thee to 'punishment. I can never make thee as 'Admah, nor set thee as Zeboim. How 'can I destroy thee, who humblest thyself 'before me? I am God and not man. "I 'have not said in vain, seek ye my face." 'I am thy God who am at peace with thee; 'who have blotted out all thy transgres-'sions: who will never leave thee nor for-'sake thee.' — May He who thus speaks to us in his word, enable us to receive it with faith and hope, that we may be strengthened and comforted, and go on our way rejoicing!

SERMON VI.

DESCRIPTION AND DIGNITY OF TRUE CHRISTIANS.

ST. MATTHEW, xii. 50.

Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my Brother, and Sister, and Mother.

WHILE JESUS, on a certain occasion, was busily engaged in teaching the people, it was told him, that "his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him." They probably came with the design of persuading Him, if not altogether to desist from his preaching, yet to abate much of the zeal and energy of his ministry; and were prepared to justify their interference on the plausible pretext, that through his excessive exertions, He would injure his health; or by his inconsiderate boldness might provoke the malice of his enemies. But he by no means approved of their conduct; and in his answer has incul-

cated a very important lesson. He has taught us, that the love which we feel for our nearest relations, and the duty which we owe to them, must not interfere with our love and duty to God: that though we are required to honour our parents, and to be kindly affectioned towards our brethren, yet still we must honour God more, and love his service and his commandments above all things. "Who," he asks, "is my mother? and, who are my brethren?" — as if he had said, 'Who are *they* that they should interrupt my ministerial duties, and endeavour 'to draw me off from that work, which my 'heavenly Father hath given me to do? 'In attempting such things, they so far 'lose their claim to my obedience and 'love.' — Then stretching forth his hand towards his disciples. He said, "Behold my mother and my brethren." 'Ye, who *wait* 'on my ministry, are dearer to me than 'even my natural relations, who would 'oppose it. Ye, who *favour* the design of 'my coming into the world, are nearer to 'my heart, than those who, however allied 'to me by blood, would endeavour, by dissuading me from my duty, to defeat my 'purpose.' "For," (as He adds in the text,) "whoever shall do the will of my Father, which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

In these words, then, we have two things proposed to us: a *Description* of Christ's disciples; and the *Dignity* conferred on them. In the *first* we learn, *Who* they really *are;* in the *second*, *What* are their *Privileges.*

I. The disciples of Christ are thus described: "They do the will of his Father which is in heaven." In this respect they follow their Divine Master, and walk in his steps: for He "came from heaven not to do his own will, but the will of Him that sent Him:" of which he gave a striking proof, when in that trying hour He said to his heavenly Father, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

There are many marks given in the Bible, of Christ's true Disciples; but perhaps there is not any one so expressly and repeatedly insisted on as this in the text. We must all remember that remarkable saying of our Lord's, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth the will* of my Father which is in heaven." Hence St. Peter speaks of the Christian as one, who "no longer lives to the lusts of men, but to the *will of God:*" and St. John says, "He that *doth the will* of God abideth for ever."*

* Matthew, vii. 21. 1 Peter, iv. 2. 1 John, ii. 17.

And there is a plain reason why this mark should be strongly insisted on. For what is the great end of Christianity, but to bring our wills into a cordial agreement with the will of God: to teach us to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, to abstain from what he forbids, and to practise what He commands? Till this be the case with us; till we think as God would have us to think, and are ready to do as He would have us to do, we are not fit for entering into heaven; nor, indeed, if allowed to enter there, could we be happy. In heaven there is no opposition to the will of God, nor any dissension from it. All the blessed inhabitants do his pleasure with one mind, and find their own pleasure in doing his. Unless then we have the same mind with them, we can neither join in their works, nor taste their happiness. But *where* is this mind to be acquired? Are we to wait till we enter heaven, before we learn to please God, and to do his will? Do we think that after living all our days on earth, pleasing ourselves, and doing our own will, we shall, at death, be enabled to do the very contrary to all which we have hitherto been doing? If we have such thoughts, we are greatly mistaken indeed. It is here, in this state of trial and probation, that we must learn to do the

will of God; otherwise we shall never do it hereafter. There is no repentance in the grave. Such as men are at death, such they will be for ever. It is true, indeed, that on earth we cannot do the will of God, *as* it will be done in heaven. There it will be done perfectly, without any interruption or opposition, either from within, or from without. But here, we can do it, at the best, only imperfectly. *Here*, we are meeting with continual interruption, are opposed at every step, and after all, can make, comparatively, but little progress. *Here*, however, the work must be begun. *Here*, it must be carried on. *Here*, on earth, the disposition must be acquired, and the habit formed. But, to form this habit, and to produce this disposition, is the great design and professed object of Christianity. It proposes and undertakes to subdue the stubborn will of man, and to bend and bow it to the will of God. And whenever the Gospel is received into the heart, and is allowed to bring forth its proper fruits, this effect will necessarily follow. The soul will be filled with a *prevailing desire* of habitually doing God's will on earth, as it is done in heaven. And hence we see the propriety of insisting on the mark in the text, of describing the disciples of Christ as

doing "the will of his Father which is in heaven."

The propriety of this description will indeed be more clearly seen, if we go further into particulars, and enquire, *when* we may be said to do the Will of God.

The will of God is made known to us in the Bible. Especially in the Revelation, which he has given to us in his Son Jesus Christ, are we taught what his Will is, and what are the things which he requires us to do. When, therefore, we do these things, we may be said to do the Will of God. Let us see, then, what these things are.

1. God would have us to believe in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the first thing which He requires us to do. When the Jews asked our Saviour, "What they should do that they might work the works of God?" He answered, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him, whom He hath sent." — And St. John expressly says, "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ."* Now, to believe in Jesus Christ, or on his name, is not merely to believe Him to be the Son of God, and sent by God into the world, but to believe in Him for the purposes for which He was sent, for the pardon

* John, vi. 29. — 1 John, iii. 23.

of our sins, and the justification of our persons. It is to receive Him as a gift given to us of God; to trust to his precious blood-shedding as the atonement for our sins; to rely on his righteousness put to our account; and, in short, to place our whole hopes of salvation, and of eternal happiness, on his merit and mediation alone. This is *the work* which God requires us to do. But let it be observed, that the very doing of *this* work, presupposes another most important work. It presupposes that we have previously renounced our own merits and righteousness; that we have been thoroughly convinced of our own unworthiness and guilt; and have for ever laid aside all thoughts of justifying ourselves before God, or of recommending ourselves to his favour by any thing that we can do. It is impossible in the nature of things, that we can believe in Jesus Christ for the pardon of our sins, without first deeply feeling that we are sinners; or that we can trust in Him for righteousness, till we are convinced that we have no righteousness of our own. To renounce ourselves, therefore, is included in the very idea of receiving Christ: and consequently, when God requires us to do the one, He of course intends that we should do the other also.

2. God requires us to repent of our sins, and to walk in newness of life. He "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."* He constantly in the Gospel joins repentance with faith, and shows how impossible it is that we can believe in Christ aright, without forsaking our sins and bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. "This is the will of God, even our sanctification."† It is his will that we no longer live after the flesh, after the course of this world, as children of disobedience, and subjects of the kingdom of darkness; but that as children of light we walk in the light, and lead new and godly lives. He requires us to lay the axe to the root of the tree; not only to renounce bad habits, and evil companions, but to resist the first motions of sin in the heart, to deny and mortify our corrupt inclinations, and in short to live in a constant warfare with the devil, the world, and the flesh. He requires us to be careful in maintaining good works; to be holy and exemplary in all our conduct and conversation, in fulfilling the duties of our station, in governing our tempers and affections, and in managing our worldly concerns. He requires us to be active, kind, and useful, not thinking only of our-

* Acts, xvii. 30. † 1 Thess. iv. 3.

selves, but mindful of the wants of others. He requires us to be meek and forgiving under injuries, contented with the portion assigned to us, patient in tribulation, in every thing giving thanks, and even rejoicing in sufferings and persecutions for righteousness' sake. He requires us to be frequent and regular in using the means of grace; in maintaining communion with Him in Prayer; in reading the Scriptures; in offering to Him spiritual sacrifices in his house; in keeping holy his sacred day.—These are the things which God requires us to do. This is his Will respecting us, as it is revealed in the Gospel of his Son: and when we do these things; when we make the doing of them our constant aim and habitual endeavour, taking no other standard than this for the rule of our conduct, and labouring to live up to it, we may then be said to do the Will of God.

Here then, again, we may see the propriety of the description in the text. Those who thus do the Will of God, are true disciples of Christ; for no others can do it. None but his true disciples can even desire or attempt to do the things required. To believe on Him with the heart unto righteousness, and to repent and walk in newness of life, are works which no man *naturally* can

do, which no man *naturally* will attempt to do. They are works above his natural strength, and quite contrary to his natural inclinations. Before he can do, before he will attempt these things, his heart must have been changed by grace, and his soul have been made partaker of a new and holy nature. He must have been born again of the Spirit, and be daily living by faith on the Son of God.

Such then are Christ's true disciples. This is the Description of them. They "do the Will of their Father which is in heaven." We consider,

II. The Dignity conferred on them. "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, which is in heaven, the same is my Brother, and Sister, and Mother."

Christ here declares how dear and how precious to Him are his true disciples. He esteems them as near relations to Himself, and feels for them all that tender love, and that strong affection, which such a relationship implies. High, and holy, and glorious as He is; mean, and evil, and polluted as they are; He is yet "not ashamed to call them brethren *," and to admit them, in that character, to communion and fellowship with Himself. Such is the Dignity to

* Heb. ii. 11.

which they are raised; and great are the Privileges which flow from it.

A Brother, if he be really one, will tenderly watch over the interests of his brethren. He will supply their wants; he will maintain their cause; he will protect them in danger; he will support them in difficulties; he will avenge their wrongs. Such will be his conduct and his feelings towards them. And such are the feelings and the conduct of Jesus Christ towards his true disciples. He is willing to save them to the uttermost, for he loves them as brethren; and what is more, He is able to do it; for, while He calls them Brethren, He "is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."* What a wonderful privilege is this, that sinful dust and ashes should be so favoured and exalted! What reason have the true disciples of Christ to rejoice and be exceeding glad, when they are assured that they have a brother in heaven; a Brother in their own nature, but at the same time their Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts: a Brother, who is their advocate with the Father, and the Propitiation for their sins; who is advanced to the right hand of the Majesty on high, on purpose that he may thoroughly perform the Kinsman's part, may manage

* Rom. ix. 5.

the spiritual concerns of his people, and so conduct them through this world, and order all things, with a reference to their present and everlasting good, as at length to make them more than conquerors, and to bring them victorious over every enemy to the kingdom of eternal rest and joy.

In further illustration of this subject, I will distinctly notice two privileges, which Christ's disciples derive from this Dignity conferred on them.

The first is Confidence in Prayer. When Christ condescends to call them Brethren, He gives them the strongest encouragement to be frequent and importunate in prayer. A sense of unworthiness, a feeling of their own weakness, and an apprehension of his Majesty and Holiness, might stop their mouths, or at least might check their approaches to the throne of mercy. They might be afraid, (for guilt and shame are full of fears,) to come into his presence, lest they should come at an improper time, or in an improper manner; and instead of being graciously received, should be deemed bold intruders, and perhaps be punished for their presumption. But the idea of a Brother is calculated to remove these fears. When Christ takes to himself this character, He bids them, as it were, to lay aside their

fears. He intimates to them, that He has always an ear open to their complaints, and a heart ready to take an interest in their sorrows. With whom should we feel confidence, if not with a Brother? From whom may we expect at all times a favourable reception, if not from a Brother? Thus encouraged, let us draw near with boldness to the throne of grace: let us confidently make known to Him all our wants by supplication and prayer with thanksgiving, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need.

A second privilege which Christ's Disciples derive from the Dignity conferred on them, is comfort in Death. Death is the great object of our fear. It is on this account called the King of Terrors; and men are said, in respect of it, to be "all their life-time subject to bondage." * And there is naturally great reason for this fear; for death is an entrance into an eternal state; the beginning of endless happiness or misery. The hour of death is not only the hour when a man's worldly happiness all ends; but the hour, when he must stand before God in judgement, and when, if he be condemned, his everlasting misery begins. No wonder then that it is an object

* Heb. ii. 15.

of fear. But it need not be so to the true disciples of Christ. They have Comfort in Death. For if Christ be their Brother, God is their Father: and death to them will only be a removal to their Father's house. Christ told his disciples before he left them, "I go to my Father and to your Father." Words full of comfort to his true disciples! The Father of their Saviour is their Father. Why then should Death alarm them? Why should they be afraid of dying? For when they die, they will go, as He went, to his Father and their Father. He who confesses them to be his Brethren on earth, will also confess them to be such before his Father in heaven; and will "present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

Upon the whole, how glorious, how blessed is the state of Christ's true disciples! How high is their dignity! How great are their privileges! Who does not wish to attain this Dignity? Who does not wish to share these Privileges? Is there a heart among us, that can hear these things, and not long to be included in the number of Christ's true disciples? And we all *may* be included in it, if we really and earnestly desire it. We are all called to be his disciples: nay, we all profess

to be his disciples. But are we all truly his disciples? Let us not deceive ourselves with a barren name, or an empty profession. We have seen, in the text, what is the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples. They do the will of God. It is not merely sitting in his house, and *hearing* his will, which will make us Christians, "Be ye *doers* of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." It is not having ever so *clear* a *knowledge* of God's will, that will make us Christ's disciples. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them." If we would have an interest in the blessings and privileges of the Gospel, we must comply with the terms of it. We must be Christians indeed, and must answer to the Description given of them in the text. We must believe in Christ for salvation: we must repent of our sins, and walk in newness of life. It is only by so doing that we can save our souls alive. If we suppose that any thing else will do, we greatly deceive ourselves. If we suppose that we can be Christians without faith in the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ, without repenting of our sins, without living a holy and a godly life, we are evidently walking in darkness, in the

broad road that leadeth to destruction. If this be the case, may the veil in mercy be taken from our eyes! May our feet be turned into the way of life! May we seek for grace to do the will of God in sincerity and truth! And may we find the blessedness of doing it, both here and for ever, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord, and our Redeemer.

SERMON VII.

THE TENDENCY TO WEARINESS IN WELL-DOING ILLUSTRATED AND OPPOSED.

2 THESSALONIANS, iii. 13.

But ye, Brethren, be not weary in well-doing.

HUMAN nature is in all ages the same. Ever since the fall of Adam, men have been subject to the same passions, liable to the same errors, and tempted to the same sins. Hence it is that the Scriptures are so generally and universally useful. They were at first addressed to man, as a weak, fallible, and corrupt creature: and such they still find him to be. The language, therefore, which they speak to him at one time, will be equally suited to him at another. Even those precepts and warnings, which were originally given to persons under *particular* circumstances, are now of *general* application, because the like circumstances are continually recurring. In

this view, the admonition in the text may still be profitably considered by us. "But ye, Brethren, be not weary in well-doing." St. Paul seems to have given this Exhortation to the Thessalonians, in reference to the following circumstances. Among the members of their Church there were some who acted very inconsistently with their Christian profession. They "walked disorderly, working not at all, but were busybodies." While the Apostle reproved such persons, and exhorted them "with quietness to work and to eat their own bread," he directed the Church in general to withdraw itself from them, so long as they continued thus disorderly, and to have no company with them, that they might be ashamed. But what might be the effect of this state of things on the Thessalonian Christians in general? Because any one of these offenders might not speedily reform his conduct, they might be tempted to give over their endeavours to reclaim him; or, because their kindness and benevolence had been in this instance abused, they might be inclined to desist from kind and benevolent exertions in future. Disappointed and discouraged, they might become remiss and inactive in the discharge of a great and an obvious duty. It 'was then with the

view of preventing this evil, of counteracting this injurious Tendency, that we may suppose the Apostle to have introduced the precept in the text, "But ye, Brethren, be not weary in well-doing." And under these circumstances, we may see the propriety and importance of the precept. But like circumstances are always to be found in the Christian Church. There is always a danger, lest the disciples of Christ should be weary in well-doing. We, at this time, are as likely, from some cause or other, to be discouraged in our benevolent exertions, and consequently to be tempted to desist from them, as the Thessalonians were. So that the precept applies with as much propriety and importance to us, as it did to them. — In making this application of the passage, I shall endeavour,

I. To state some of the principal Causes of that Tendency to Weariness in Well-doing, against which the caution in the Text admonishes us to guard.

II. To offer some Considerations which may help to oppose this Tendency.

I. Among the Causes of the Tendency in question, one of the most obvious and prevalent is a natural fickleness of mind, a love of change and novelty, which of itself strongly tempts us to become weary in well-

doing. This disposition very frequently works in us, even when our own interests are concerned. How much more likely, then, will it be to work in us, when the interests of others only are at stake? To resist this propensity, and to go on in a steady uniform course of kind and benevolent exertion, requires a strength of principle, and a degree of perseverance, which it is difficult to acquire and maintain. This will especially be the case, whenever some one particular object continues for a long time to demand our attention. On the first hearing of some distressing tale, at the sight of some fresh calamity, our feelings are strongly agitated. Our pity and compassion are called into lively exercise. We deeply feel for the sufferer, and hasten with alacrity and earnestness to administer consolation and relief. But by degrees this ardour naturally cools. First emotions insensibly subside. Familiarity with suffering blunts the edge of the feelings towards it. The mind being accustomed to witness the same scene, ceases to take the same lively interest in it. Thus, in proportion as the calamity continues, the exertions to relieve it become less active and less constant. Some new object occurs to excite and engage the feelings: and the former one, if not wholly neg-

lected, is yet attended to with an increasing remissness, which betrays evident marks of that Weariness in Well-doing, against which we are admonished in the text. This is the natural course of things, and will most likely take place, unless some strong opposition be made to it; and some vigorous efforts be applied to counteract its tendency.

The necessity, indeed, of such efforts will be still stronger, where perseverance in well-doing must be accompanied, as in many cases it certainly will be, with a degree, greater or less, of self-denial, and with the sacrifice of personal ease and indulgence. Let us suppose, for instance, that from a sense of duty, or from the impulse of compassion, we have undertaken to devote a large portion of our time to attend on a sick friend, or to give up a certain part of our income, which perhaps cannot be conveniently spared, to the support or comfort of a distressed relation. It must be obvious, with whatever *forwardness* we originally undertook this labour of love, that such sacrifices of our time and property will prove strong temptations in the way of our perseverance in them, and in no slight degree will operate to make us weary in well-doing. In such circumstances there will certainly be a considerable danger, lest our bene-

volent exertions should be relaxed, and a desire should secretly arise in the mind of withdrawing ourselves from an engagement which brings along with it so heavy a burden.

In the second place, a Want of Success in our efforts to do good is another temptation to grow weary in well-doing. Having been disappointed in the result of our kind endeavours, we are apt to become tired of continuing them. Because one effort has not yet proved successful, we are tempted to think, that no other will succeed: and thus discouraged and dispirited at what we consider the failure of our kind intentions, we feel less interest in the business, and in a kind of despondency are ready to give over the attempt as vain and visionary. Let us suppose, for example, that we have been long and anxiously labouring to reclaim a sinner from the error of his ways. This is especially an act of well-doing. But hitherto our labour has been seemingly thrown away. He has resisted every mode which has been used to effect his reformation. Advice, rebuke, entreaty, promises, threatenings, have all been employed to no purpose. He still goes on in his own way, and will listen neither to admonitions nor persuasions. Now, in this case, how strong is the tempt-

ation to grow weary of the attempt, and to desist from our charitable design! How likely are we to give up, in our minds, the hope of succeeding, and to become tired of repeating endeavours which have been used so long in vain!—Take another example. Suppose that you have been long trying to conciliate an enemy. With this view you have made all reasonable concessions; you have on some occasions sacrificed your own convenience or even advantage; you have carefully avoided every thing which might give fresh offence, and so widen the breach. You have endeavoured, by all means in your power, to soften his resentment, to obviate his prejudices, to remove his misconceptions. But hitherto your efforts have failed of success. Your enemy is not conciliated. He still keeps, and shows that he keeps, his enmity towards you. Your kindest efforts are misunderstood. Your best endeavours to overcome his evil with good are mistaken. No ground seems to be gained. Now, under these circumstances, are you not in danger of growing weary in well-doing? Are you not powerfully tempted? are you not at times almost persuaded to say, 'I will no longer 'follow so delusive an object. I will no 'longer attempt what it seems impossible to

67987

'accomplish. I am tired of trying to sub-
'due such inveterate enmity. I will give
'myself no further trouble. I will take
'no further pains, since every thing which I
'can do will be in vain?'

To the Causes already mentioned, which tend to make us weary in well-doing, another is still to be added. In our endeavours to do good to others, we may not only have failed of success, but we may have brought on ourselves even unkind and injurious treatment. We may have met with ingratitude from those who ought at least to have felt obliged and thankful to us for our exertions in their behalf, even though they may have been unwilling to profit by them. Or we may have been deceived and imposed on by designing persons, who, taking advantage of our favourable dispositions towards them, may have abused our good nature, and defrauded us of our property. By our very attempts to conciliate an enemy, we may have increased his resentment, and incurred from him worse usage than before. Our concessions and sacrifices may have been imputed merely to fear, to interest, or to some other selfish and unworthy motive: so that reproach and calumny have been the only fruit of our labour. Now in all these cases, and in cases like these, it must

be clear, that the temptation to desist from our work of love is direct and strong. There is great danger, lest provoked by such unmerited returns, we should be weary of well-doing; lest, meeting only with ingratitude, fraud, and misrepresentation, as the reward of all our endeavours to do good, we should too readily yield to the suggestions which such a provocation naturally inspires, and should hastily resolve no longer to continue endeavours which have experienced so unsuitable a return.

Having thus stated some of the principal Causes of that Tendency to Weariness in well-doing, against which we are admonished in the text, I shall now endeavour,

II. To offer some Considerations which may help to oppose this Tendency.

1. Consider the Example of Jesus Christ. This Example is binding on all his followers. They are bound, so far as they are able, to walk in his steps, and to do as He did. Nay it is their *interest*, their *privilege*, no less than their duty, to have the same mind with Him, and to be conformed to his image. How then does his example bear on the point in question? Was he weary in well-doing? Did any of the Causes which we have mentioned induce Him to desist from his work and labour of love? Far otherwise. His

whole life was spent in doing good to the bodies and souls of men. This was the great object which He proposed to Himself. This was the merciful office which He had assumed, and we never find Him weary of his undertaking. Remember to how much personal inconvenience, fatigue, and self-denial He put himself, that He might fulfil his gracious design, and minister to the temporal and spiritual wants of others. On some occasions we see Him depriving himself of rest; on others, of food, rather than diappoint the expectations of those who came to Him for instruction or relief. Remember how little encouragement He met with in his charitable attempts. Notwithstanding the mighty works which He did, the cures which He performed, the blesssings which He dispensed wherever He came, how few believed on him! How small a number of those, among whom he went about doing good, were induced to receive and honour Him as a Prophet sent from God! Even such as had recourse to him as a Physician for their bodies, yet, in general, rejected Him as a spiritual Saviour. Remember further, what ingratitude, reproach, and persecution He encountered throughout the discharge of his office! With what unthankful and even injurious treatment was his

kindness frequently repaid! His enemies, instead of being reconciled by his miracles of love and mercy, only hated Him the more for these proofs of his Divine authority. The more good He did, the more perversely were they set against Him, and the more maliciously did they seek his life. Remember all these things: and think what temptations He was under to become weary in well-doing. But he yielded not to these temptations. He withstood them all. He endured unto the end. He patiently persevered in well-doing. He healed the servant of the High Priest, who was come out to seize Him. He prayed for his murderers. He forgave the thief, who had reviled Him on the cross. Are you a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ? Then go, and do Thou likewise. Be not weary in well-doing.

2. Consider what has been the conduct of Jesus Christ towards *yourself.* Has He been weary of doing good to *you?* From the hour of your birth He has been doing you good. Every day his kindness towards you has been renewed. To Him you are indebted for life, and health, and strength; for food and raiment, and friends; for every thing which has made life pleasant or comfortable. But he has added to these temporal blessings still greater mercies, even

spiritual blessings. He has bestowed on you the means of grace and salvation. He has continued them to you until this very day. He has daily vouchsafed to you fresh supplies of his spirit, to warn, to strengthen, to direct you. But while He has been thus forward and ready to do you good, have you not been backward in profiting by his mercies? Have you not abused his kindness, turned his very gifts into occasions of sin, and presumed on his long-suffering and forbearance so far, as even in a degree to sin on, that grace might abound? Have you not slighted the salvation which he has offered you? Have you not profaned his Sabbaths, neglected his worship, despised his word, and resisted his Spirit? In short, have you not done enough to wear out his patience? Have you not been so unthankful, and unholy, so perverse, and provoking, that He might justly have been weary of doing you good, and might long ago have ceased to show you favour and kindness? But this has not been the case. Even now He is daily overlooking many offences, daily passing by many provocations. And shall you then be weary of well-doing to your Fellow-creatures? Freely you are receiving, freely give. Let the Lord's conduct towards you be the rule of your conduct towards others.

Let his patience and unwearied kindness to you be the measure of your patience and kindness to them. When He shall be weary of bearing with your infirmities, and of ministering to your wants, then, and not till then, deem yourself at liberty to grow weary in well-doing towards your weak and necessitous brethren.

3. Consider, that there is an express promise given to perseverance in well-doing. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, having inserted a like admonition with this to the Thessalonians in the text, adds to it a most encouraging assurance: "Let us not be weary in well-doing, *for in due time we shall reap if we faint not.*" This promise may be understood in two ways: in both of which, it holds out a powerful inducement to comply with the admonition in the text.

First, It may mean, that though our endeavours to do good in any particular instance may hitherto have failed of success, *yet in due time they will be accomplished.* We are reminded that while we use the means, God only can make them effectual: and, if to try our faith and patience, He has hitherto withheld his blessing from them, yet we are further reminded, that it will not be always so; that if we persevere in using the means, we

may reasonably hope, that He will one day crown them with the desired success. Here, then, is great encouragement to proceed in our attempts, and not to be weary. Who can tell but that our *very next* endeavours to reclaim the sinner, or to reconcile an enemy, may prove effectual? Who can tell but that God's time may at length be come; and that it may please Him to make an impression on the heart, which has never been made before? Let us not then be weary or faint in our minds. Are we tempted to desist, are we inclined to despond? Let us remember, that "in due time we shall reap, if we faint not."

Secondly, The promise may mean, that whether our endeavours may *here* be successful or not, yet that, *in the end*, our labour will not be in vain in the Lord. In this world our attempts to do good may sometimes fail. Our kind intentions and efforts may be unsuccessful. But let us not be discouraged at these things. In the world to come, we shall reap the fruit of our present exertions. Our patient continuance in well-doing, our persevering endeavours to alleviate the sufferings, to lighten the burdens, or to save the souls of others, will be produced in the Day of Judgement as evidences of our faith in Him,

who will not judge us by the success of our labours, but by the motives which dictated them; who has graciously told us, that a cup of cold water given to a disciple in his name shall in *no wise lose its reward:* and that whatever acts of kindness and charity we do to his brethren from love to Him, He will graciously consider, and recompense, as if they had been done to Himself. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." * What greater encouragement can we want to perseverance in well-doing than the approbation and favour of our heavenly Master? What stronger inducement could we have, not to grow weary in this work and labour of love, than the reflection that we are in the most acceptable way, testifying our love to Him, who loved us and gave Himself for us; and who has commanded us to show our love to Him, by loving one another, and by pitying and ministering to the wants of our fellow-creatures, as He has pitied and ministered to our wants? May this reflection sink deep into all our hearts! May it lead us to abound in love and in good works; and in a patient continuance in well-doing, to wait for honour, and glory, and immortality!

* Matthew, xxv. 40.

SERMON VIII.

CHRISTIANS ENCOURAGED AGAINST THE FEAR OF MAN.

ISAIAH, li. 7, 8.

Hearken unto me, Ye that know righteousness, the People in whose heart is my law; fear Ye not the reproach of men, neither be Ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my Righteousness shall be for ever, and my Salvation from generation to generation.

THERE is no interpreter of the Bible so good as the Bible itself. It is by comparing one part of Scripture with another, "spiritual things with spiritual," that we shall in general best understand the meaning. Thus the New Testament greatly helps to explain the Old. By the writings of the Apostles, we are not only taught to see the meaning of the Types, Shadows, and Pre-

dictions, which we meet with in the writings of Moses, David, and the Prophets, but we are also instructed to understand and apply the consolations and promises with which the works of these holy men abound. Let us take for an example the passage in the text. Considered by the light which the New Testament throws on the subject, and compared, not only with its general tenor and spirit, but also with many particular passages in the Gospels and Epistles, the words may clearly be understood as addressed by Christ Himself to his people; and as designed to furnish them with support and encouragement under the reproaches and trials, to which for his sake they may be exposed from worldly and ungodly men. "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the People in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation."

In thus applying the passage, I shall more particularly point out to you,

I. The Persons addressed.

II. The Address made to them.

I. The Persons here addressed, we have

already observed, are the people of Christ. And they are thus described. He addresses them as those "who know righteousness; the People, in whose heart is my law." If we were to search the Bible from one end to the other we could not find a more evangelical description of true Christians, than that which is given in these words of the Prophet, when explained and interpreted by the writings of the New Testament. It consists, as we see, of two parts.

1st. The People here addressed, are those who "*know righteousness.*"

The word *Righteousness* as used in the Gospel, has generally a peculiar meaning. It is employed to signify that Way of justifying sinners, or of accounting and treating them as *Righteous* which God has provided and revealed in the Gospel. Hence it is often called the *Righteousness of God;* because God has made it known to us: and not seldom the *Righteousness of Faith;* because it is by faith that it is apprehended and applied. Hence St. Paul, speaking of the Gospel as "the power of God unto salvation," assigns this as a reason: "for therein is the Righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith*:" and though witnessed by the law and the Prophets, it

* Rom. i. 17.

was now "manifested" by the preaching of the Gospel. Now this Righteousness, or Way of justifying sinners, is by the Righteousness of Christ, received by faith, and put to their account. Believing in Him, they are accounted and dealt with as if they were righteous. In consideration of what He hath suffered and done in human nature, they, who by faith are become one with Him, stand complete in Him. Their sins are pardoned; their persons are accepted; their title to heaven is restored and secured. Thus, though in themselves unrighteous, having no righteousness of their own which can answer the demands of the law, they are said to have "attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith."* It is in this evangelical sense that we are to understand the word *Righteousness* in this part of the text: agreeably to which interpretation, we find Christ speaking of it in the latter part of the text as *His* Righteousness: "but *my* Righteousness shall be for ever." And what is this Righteousness which shall be for ever, but that "everlasting Righteousness, which He has brought in†," even "the Righteousness of God,

* Rom. ix. 30. † Dan. ix. 24.

which is by faith of Jesus Christ, and is unto all, and upon all them that believe."*

It is this Righteousness, then, which the people in the text are represented as *knowing*. They "know Righteousness." They see and understand the great doctrine of Justification by Faith, as revealed and taught in the Gospel. Nay more, they not only understand it, but they approve of it; they acquiesce in and submit to it. They have been brought to see that they have no righteousness of their own: that tried by the holy and spiritual law of God they cannot stand before Him in judgement; and consequently that they have need of some other righteousness, in which they may appear before His dread tribunal, and may come into his presence with acceptance. Thus feeling, deeply feeling, their own insufficiency, they gladly hear, and thankfully accept, the offers of Righteousness made to them in the Gospel; and believing what is there written, they find comfort to their souls. "Being justified by faith, they have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Thus they "*know* Righteousness." They know it inwardly and experimentally. Compare their state with that which Saint

* Rom. iii. 22.

Paul describes to have been the state of the unbelieving Jews. He bears them record, "that they had a zeal of God: but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, had not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."* Now the Persons described in the text are in every particular opposite to the Jews here spoken of. "The zeal of God which they have *is* according to knowledge. For they are *not* ignorant of God's Righteousness: and consequently do *not* go about to establish their own Righteousness; but *do* submit themselves to the Righteousness of God." In short, with the same Apostle, they earnestly desire "to win Christ, and to be found in Him, not having their own Righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the Righteousness which is of God by faith."† This is one part of their character.

2d. They have the law of God in their heart.

This is the other, and a no less important part of their character. It is a distinction, which peculiarly marks out the people of

* Rom. x. 3. † Philippians, iii. 9.

Christ. In that better covenant, of which He was the Mediator, established upon better promises, it was expressly foretold as one of these promises, that he would "put His laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts."* Let us see what this expression means.

The Law of God is the Law of the Ten Commandments. It is that Holy, Just, and Good Law, which is necessarily given by a Holy, Just, and Good God, and is in fact a Copy of Himself. God is Love: and His Law therefore is Love. It enjoins and requires Love; Love to God, and Love to Man for God's sake. To have this Law, then, in the heart, is to have the likeness and image of God there. It is to have love in the heart. It implies that there is an inward disposition to delight in the Law of God, to obey and practise it. It means that the soul is conformed to His will, and is desirous above all things to do whatever He commands, and would have it to do. Now that this state and disposition of the heart is peculiar to the people of Christ, the following statement will clearly show. When man was first created, the Law of God *was* in his heart, "for he was made in the image of God, after His likeness."

* Jeremiah, xxxi. 33.

He loved God, and was disposed, and delighted to do His will. But this image he lost at the fall. Having sinned, he no longer retained the Divine likeness. He no longer loved God, nor his holy law, and will. From that time "the carnal mind," which means the mind of man in its natural state, under the dominion of sin, "is enmity against God;" and consequently "is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be."* Far from delighting in its holy and reasonable precepts, the carnal mind dislikes them; regards them as unjust and oppressive; rebels against them, and strives to be altogether free from their restraint and control. Its secret language is, "Let me break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from me." Thus the law of God is not in the heart. And need we be reminded what a dreadful state this is? Surely if we reflect for a moment, we must be sensible, that to have in our minds enmity against God, the Good, the Just, the Holy God, to dislike his service, to hate his law, is indeed a dreadful state. Yet it is naturally the state of all men since the fall of Adam. They are all born in *his* image, after *his* likeness, and not after God's. They

* Rom. viii. 7.

are all born with carnal minds, and rebellious wills: nor is there any remedy for this dreadful evil, any cure for this inveterate disease, but that which the Gospel provides. Christ is the only Physician, who can heal this malady, and can restore the soul to its original health. It is only through His grace that this great and important change can be wrought in the heart; that the carnal mind can become spiritual; that the soul can be renewed to the likeness and image of God. Man of himself is not only utterly unable to effect this mighty change in his own heart, but he is utterly indisposed to set about it. The people therefore in the text, who are described as having the Law of God in their heart, have been brought into this state by Jesus Christ, and consequently are His people. He is the Person who, in fulfilment of his own gracious promise, has taken away the heart of stone, and *has given to* them a heart of flesh; has put his Spirit within them, and causes them to walk in his statutes. He it is who has put his law in their minds, and has written it in their hearts. Being justified by his blood, they are also sanctified by his Spirit. Having been brought to trust in his righteousness, and to flee to Him for refuge, they have been graciously accepted, treated as dear

children, and adorned with the graces and beauties of his Spirit. Thus they find in themselves a great and a sensible change. They perceive that a work, to which they once were strangers, has been wrought in their souls. They feel that they love that holy law, which they once disliked. They see the reasonableness and excellence of its precepts. They long to obey it perfectly; to be entirely conformed to it in the spirit of their minds. They no longer knowingly and deliberately allow themselves in the practice of any thing which it forbids, or in the omission of any thing which it commands. They condemn themselves severely for even their unhallowed transgressions of it. They grieve and lament that they cannot fulfil its injunctions better. They pray daily for grace to enable them to walk according to its spiritual demands; and they look forward to Heaven as the place of consummate happiness, because there they shall be perfectly freed from all remainder of sin, and shall serve God and do his will, as cheerfully and constantly, as the Blessed Angels themselves. Such are the persons addressed in the text. Who are there among us, that answer this description, that thus know Righteousness, and have the Law of God in

their hearts; that find within themselves those convictions and desires, those feelings and dispositions which I have shown to belong to the persons here described? Let all such pay peculiar attention, while we consider,

II. The Address here made to them.

"Hearken unto me.—Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation."

Let us remember Who is the speaker of these words; the same Divine person who, in the days of his flesh, declared to his disciples, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake."* He is the Person, who here says to his people, "Hearken unto me." The Address may be considered as containing an encouraging exhortation enforced by powerful arguments. The exhortation is this: "Fear ye not the reproach of men; neither be ye afraid of their revilings." It is here supposed that the people of Christ may sometimes meet with reproaches, and

* Matt. v. 11.

revilings from ungodly men. And this is a very probable supposition: for the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, is enmity also against the people of God. We have already seen that they who know righteousness, and in whose heart is the Law of God, are in some measure renewed to his image. What wonder is it, then, if those who dislike God himself, should dislike his image in his People? Indeed it has been always so. No sooner was a Saviour promised to fallen man, but it was also declared that there would be "enmity between the seed of the woman," that is Christ, and His People, "and the seed of the Serpent," that is, the Devil, and his Children. And from the days of Cain, who hated and slew his brother, because his deeds were righteous, this enmity has constantly appeared. It has not indeed always shown itself in the same way. Men have not always shown their hatred of God's People by taking away their lives. It is not always that they have had it in their power to act thus: and when they have had the power, different circumstances have often restrained them from using it. But there is one way in which, in all ages, they have usually betrayed their malice and enmity against the People of God; and that has been by speaking evil of them; by

reviling, and ridiculing them; by fixing on them reproachful names; by inventing, and propagating false and malicious stories respecting them. Thus "they whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words; that they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not." How frequently is this the case in our own times! Does any one pay more attention to religion than his neighbours? Does he forsake the sins which they continue to practise? Does he improve, with earnestness and zeal, those means of grace which they altogether neglect, or formally use? Does he show an anxiety for his Soul, which they do not feel for their's? In this case, how probable is it that their mouths will be open against him! How probable is it that perhaps before his face, but certainly behind his back, they will reproach and revile him! Do not some of those who know righteousness, and in whose heart is the Law of God, find this to be the case? Let them hearken to the encouraging Exhortation in the text. The Lord says to them by his Prophet, "Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings." Be not cast down at these things. Let not these trials alarm and

dispirit you. Meet them with boldness. Bear them with fortitude. Let not the dread of them induce you to go back in your course, to conceal your profession, or to lessen your exertions. Persist in the right way, whatever may be said against you. Go on "through evil report, and good report." For consider by what powerful arguments this Exhortation is enforced. They who now reproach and revile the People of God will quickly be brought to an end. If their malice be not extinguished, yet the means of gratifying it will be no more. They are mortals, and as such they must soon die. "The moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the Worm shall eat them like wool." Their rage shall be impotent; their malice vain; and they themselves like a moth-eaten garment. On the other hand, "my Righteousness (saith the Lord) shall be for ever, and my Salvation from generation to generation." In vain do ungodly men speak evil of his cause. It shall survive all their attacks; and shall flourish and increase, when they who reviled or opposed it, shall be silent in darkness. In vain are his People reproached and reviled. They cannot be really injured by such attempts. They are founded on a Rock, and can never be moved. The

Righteousness which they know, is an everlasting Righteousness. The Salvation in which they trust, is from generation to generation. The Lord is concerned, and pledged to protect, support, and bless them. He will never leave them, nor forsake them. He has undertaken to complete their final and eternal happiness: and He will not leave his work unfinished. He will give them victory over all their enemies. He will at length perfectly renew them to his own image; and will put them in possession of an incorruptible Inheritance, which will never fade. With such prospects, founded on such promises, secured by such a Saviour, what little reason have they to fear the reproach of men, or to be afraid of their revilings! How little ought these things to be regarded by them! Are you tempted, from the fear of ridicule, or reproach, to hide your religious profession, to comply with the customs of worldly men, and so in fact to deny Christ? Resist such a temptation. Think of *whom* you are afraid; *whose* ridicule, *whose* reproaches you fear; of mortal, of perishing, of dying men; whom the moth, and the worm will quickly consume. Think how little such creatures are to be feared: how little their enmity and malice are to be dreaded. Think also of the re-

compense of reward; of the glorious recompense, which will be the reward of perseverance in well-doing. Think of the precious promises, the unfading Inheritance, the Crown of Glory. Set them now before you by faith. Thus overcome the world; and, instead of being terrified by the revilings of men, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven." Only let it be your endeavour so to live, as to give no just occasion for the reproaches and calumnies which may be cast on you. Study to adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things, and "by well-doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: that they may be ashamed, who falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." If men will speak evil of you, let it be *falsely*. If you must suffer from their revilings, see that it be *for Christ's sake;* for your attachment to his service, for your obedience to his commands, for your love to his people. Approve your hearts to Him who seeth and searcheth the heart. Be faithful in his sight, and fear not what man can do unto you.

SERMON IX.

CAUTIONS AND CONSOLATIONS.

JEREMIAH, viii. 20.

The Harvest is passed, the Summer is ended, and we are not saved.

THE Prophet puts these words into the mouth of the Jews, among whom he lived, as descriptive of their state at that time, under the impending judgements of God. They had neglected to improve the means and opportunities which had been granted to them for securing their national liberty and happiness. Instead of trusting in the Almighty, and endeavouring to preserve his favour and protection, they had sought help from other quarters, which had only deceived and failed them. Instead of breaking off from their sins by repentance, and of returning to God, they had obstinately persisted in disobedience and rebellion. The consequence was, that the destruc-

tion with which they had been threatened, was now ready to burst upon their heads. In this gloomy state of their affairs, under a conviction of their past folly and sin, and in the prospect of speedy and seemingly unavoidable ruin, they are represented as breaking forth into this pathetic lamentation; "The Harvest is past, the Summer is ended, and we are not saved."

In this view of the passage we cannot but see the force and propriety of the expressions employed. The season in which measures should have been taken for defence and security, had been suffered to pass unimproved. No further means would be granted. Opportunities lost could not be recalled. In this sense "The Harvest was past, the Summer was ended." The time for laying up a store against the evil days was gone; and no provision was made. "They were not saved." They were not prepared against the wants and horrors of the season which approached. They were ready to perish, and saw no way of escape.

Such appears to be the meaning of the passage in relation to the Jews: to whom alone it is strictly and directly applicable. But it may be *accommodated* to another purpose. It may admit of a *general* application. It may be interpreted in a *spiritual*

sense. By the Salvation spoken of may be understood the Salvation of the Soul. "The Harvest" and the "Summer" may be viewed as denoting those means and opportunities which are mercifully vouchsafed to us for making provision for Eternity, for effecting our peace with God, and obtaining a meetness for the Heavenly Inheritance. And in this sense of the passage, the Lamentation contained in it may be understood in three different ways, each of which it shall be the business of the present discourse separately to state and consider.

I. The Lamentation in the text may be understood as the language of *final and absolute Despair.* "The Harvest is past, the Summer is ended, and we are not saved." 'We were long favoured with the means of 'grace and salvation. We enjoyed for many 'years the opportunity of providing for 'our immortal Souls. We were daily called 'on to renounce our sins, to be reconciled to God, and to lay up treasures in 'heaven. But we neglected these means. 'We wasted this opportunity. We slighted 'this call. We resisted the secret motions 'of God's Holy Spirit on our hearts. We 'listened not to the louder voice, and more 'distinct admonitions of His providence. 'We altogether forsook His Ordinances and

'Institutions, or only used them in a formal 'and a lifeless manner. We set at nought 'all his Counsels, and would none of his 'reproof. We hated knowledge, and did 'not choose the fear of the Lord. Not-'withstanding his patience and long-suffer-'ing towards us, we went on frowardly 'in our own way, and hardened our hearts 'against him, till at length we provoked Him 'to anger, and He sware in his wrath, that 'we should never enter into his rest. He 'has denounced on us the curse of perpe-'tual barrenness, and has shut us up under 'his final displeasure. He has cut us off 'from his presence, holds us in abhorrence, 'and will no more be entreated by us. We 'have no longer any hope in his mercy. 'We have nothing to expect from Him but 'Judgement and Misery. We have nothing 'to look forward to but to an Eternity of 'suffering; to everlasting destruction from 'the presence of the Lord, and from the 'glory of his power; to the worm that never 'dieth, and to the fire that never shall be 'quenched.' — Such, it is greatly to be feared, will be the language of numbers in the last day of solemn account. Such will then be the Lamentation of many, who in this life have even called Jesus "Lord, Lord," and in his name have done many

wonderful works. What, in that day, when they shall break forth into this aweful Lamentation — what will be their misery, their consternation and dismay, I pretend not to describe, neither can any of us conceive. May the language never be ours! May this aweful Lamentation never proceed out of our mouths! — But, my Brethren, such a wish, however fervent, will not save us. We may anxiously desire to die the death of the Righteous, while at the very time we are walking in the broad road which leadeth to destruction. The real point is this, What at the present moment is the actual state of our soul? If it should this night be required of us, what would become of it? On being separated from the body, and called to give up our account, in what condition should we find ourselves to be? Should we discover too late that our Harvest is past; that our Summer is ended; and that we are not saved? Should we discover too late, that notwithstanding our religious advantages, perhaps our religious professions, we are still "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity," and have "neither part nor lot in the matter?" Perhaps we are unwilling even for a moment to admit the possibility of this being the case. We reject the very supposition of it with indig-

nation and abhorrence. But let us not deceive ourselves with vain imaginations. Let us not mistake a presumptuous confidence for a well grounded scriptural hope. Let us be assured, that unless we are living the life of the Righteous, we shall never die their death. Let us be assured, that unless, under a deep conviction of our lost and ruined state by sin, we have heartily come to Jesus Christ for pardon, peace, and holiness; — unless, through the mighty operation of His Spirit on our hearts, we are really become "new Creatures," "transformed by the renewing of our minds;" — unless, under the gracious influence of the same Spirit, we are daily bringing forth the fruits of Righteousness, and living by faith on the Son of God; — unless such be the effects and fruits of our religious advantages and professions, we are evidently deceiving ourselves: we are evidently trifling with our advantages, and belying our profession: we are not improving the means which God has put into our power for working out our salvation: we are not making provision during the season of his grace and long-suffering for the hour of death and the Day of Judgement. Our Harvest is passing away; our Summer is drawing nigh unto an end; and we are not saved: and if death overtake us in this state,

we are lost for ever. Let us then arise and search our hearts. Let us dread the doom of the foolish virgins. Let us see that we have oil in our vessels, as well as in our lamps; the reality of faith and grace in our hearts, as well as the appearance of them in our lives. Let us not merely rest in the form, but strive to experience the power of Godliness. Let us not be satisfied with our spiritual state, "till Christ shall dwell in our hearts by faith:" till, being "rooted and grounded in love," we shall abound in all the fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God: till, by a progressive growth in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, and in a conformity to his image, we give evident proof to others, and especially to our own hearts, that our harvest is *not* past, that our summer is *not* ended; but that we *are* saved, brought into, and living in that state of Salvation, wherein we may hope to be "kept by the power of God through faith."

II. The Lamentation in the text may be understood as the Language of *deep and humbling Conviction.*

Persons, who for a long time have been living either in a total neglect of religion, or at least in a formal and lifeless Profession

of it, at length, through the Divine Mercy, are awakened to a sight and sense of their guilt and danger. They now strongly feel the weight of that momentous Truth, which hitherto they have never felt, or never felt in any adequate degree, that the Care of the soul is "The One Thing needful:" while the pure and spiritual nature of that worship, which God demands, being now discovered, they perceive at what an immense distance they are from Him, and how wholly unprepared in heart and state for standing before him with favour and acceptance. At the same time, the recollection of the many advantages and privileges which they have enjoyed, of the length of time during which they have been spared, as well as of their own wilful blindness, perverseness and impenitence, stares them in the face, and leaves them without any excuse. And under these impressions and convictions, they perceive how suitable to them is the language of the text.—Nay, the words seem to be written on purpose to describe their state, and, as it appears to them, their *hopeless* state; for this idea usually accompanies the convictions of which we are speaking, and fills the mind with the most distressing apprehensions. "Their harvest is passed; their summer is ended;

and they are not saved." 'Their oppor-'tunity—the only opportunity which will 'be vouchsafed to them—for securing the 'safety of their soul, is gone by unimproved, 'and is gone by for ever. No other will 'be granted to them. Their day of grace 'is over. They must perish without re-'medy.'

Such are the gloomy thoughts which a sense of their guilt and danger suggests to their minds; and which Satan, joining with these convictions, endeavours to impress and rivet on their hearts. But how are such persons to be treated? Are they to be encouraged in these desponding thoughts? Are they to be left to sink down into despair? No: Man, placed under a dispensation of mercy, has in this world nothing to do with despair. He may, indeed, and must despair of saving himself: he may and must despair of being saved in his sins; but in no case can he have any ground whatever to despair of being saved, whensoever he is brought to see the true nature of Salvation, and his own real need of it. Are any then in the state here attempted to be described? Are they awakened to see their sinful state, and are they alarmed and troubled at the sight? Are they sensible that their sins are very numerous, of long continuance, and

so aggravated by many circumstances, as to be even red like crimson, or black as the Æthiopian's skin? Do they feel their heart to be hardened, their nature to be depraved in every part, and their whole soul to be so diseased, so full of "wounds and bruises and putrefying sores*," as that, in the words of our church, they 'have no health in them?' Is this their state? Are these the thoughts, these the views which they have of themselves? And, in consequence, are they ready to say, 'There is no hope for us. Our 'harvest is past; our summer is ended; and 'we are not, we never can be saved?'—O yield not to such desponding conclusions! Gratify not the malice of your worst enemy by giving up yourselves as lost. You have need of repentance, of humiliation, of deep shame, and heartfelt contrition: but you have no need of, nay, you have no cause for, Despair. You may indeed have lost much time, and may have wasted many opportunities; and by these things you may have greatly increased and aggravated your guilt: —yet, even now, if you sincerely desire and earnestly knock for admission, the door will not in the end be shut against you. It may for a time appear to be closed: but in due time it will be opened to you. The

* Isaiah, i. 6.

Lord Jesus is still waiting to receive you to the arms of his mercy. The Holy and Blessed Spirit of God is still ready to help your infirmities, and to assist your efforts. You may fear, perhaps, that he has ceased to strive with you: but your present fears and convictions are a proof to the contrary. Call to mind the encouragement which the Scriptures uniformly give to hope in the Lord, notwithstanding all that is past. In the many gracious invitations and promises to returning Sinners, nothing is said of past neglects and past transgressions by way of discouragement. On the contrary, it is expressly declared, that "whosoever *will*, let him take of the water of life freely.*" The Labourers in the Parable, who came into the Vineyard even at the eleventh hour, received equal wages with those "who had borne the burden and heat of the day." The Prodigal was graciously owned and welcomed as a son, so soon as he came home to his father's house, notwithstanding that he had wasted his substance in riotous living. While the Thief upon the Cross stands forth a never-to-be-forgotten instance of the long-suffering and tender mercy of the Lord.—Take notice that these things are not stated with the view of encouraging any to con-

* Rev. xxii. 17.

tinue in their sins on the presumptuous confidence that they also shall be pardoned at last. If any thus perversely abuse the doctrine of grace, they abuse it to their own destruction. But these things are set forth as powerful dissuasives against Despair. They are adduced in the hope of exciting those who are ready to say — 'Our harvest 'is past; our summer is ended; and we are 'not saved,' — to lay aside their desponding thoughts, and to redeem the time that remains. True it may be that they are not as yet saved; not as yet "washed, justified, and sanctified;" but this is no reason why they should not be saved hereafter; if they will now attempt to seek these things "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God." Then "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;" and "make straight paths for your feet." With humility, and prayer, and dependence on the help and teaching of the Holy Spirit of God, set about the great work of saving your soul alive. Go on, relying on the merits and mediation of the Exalted Redeemer; plead in his name; cast yourselves on his mercy; and doubt not but in due time you will find that there is "Balm in Gilead." Your present sorrow will be turned into joy. You will re-

ceive "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

III. The Lamentation in the text may be understood as the language of *distressing and gloomy Despondency:* such Despondency as the afflicted and tempted servants of Jesus Christ sometimes experience. They really in heart belong to Him; but from some circumstances in their present state, they conclude against themselves that they are none of His. The Lord, for wise reasons best known to Himself, has permitted their minds to be clouded, their evidences to be darkened, the comfortable sense of His own presence to be taken away, and perhaps Satan to have come in like a flood upon their minds, filling them with horror, confusion, and blackness. In this disturbed and afflicted state, their peace is gone, their hope is perished, and they take to themselves the melancholy sentiment in the text, "The harvest is past; the summer is ended; and we are not saved." 'After all that we have 'thought, and felt, and said on the subject 'of religion, we find at last that we have 'been deceiving ourselves. After all our 'professed attachment to Jesus Christ; after 'all our labours and sufferings in his ser-'vice, in support of his cause, and with an

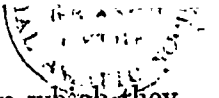
'eye, as we had hoped, to his glory, we 'now perceive that we have been only hypo- 'crites and false professors. We have never 'really seen, known, or loved Him. We 'have never really had His Spirit in our 'hearts. For otherwise how could it be 'thus with us? Did we in truth belong to 'Him, He would never have suffered all 'these things to come upon us. The pre- 'sent state of our minds is a proof that 'we have neither part nor lot in the matter. 'We have wasted our opportunity of secur- 'ing an interest in the Saviour of the 'World. We must perish at last.' Now what shall be said to such persons? Nothing indeed can be effectually said to them, so as to remove their trouble, and restore them to their former peace and hope, till the Spirit shall be poured out from on high, and by His light the cloud shall be dissipated. But still, in subserviency to His power, and in humble dependence on His blessing, it may be told them, that many real servants of God have endured such things; have been led to form such gloomy conclusions respecting their spiritual condition; and have thus written bitter things against themselves. Job, Jeremiah, David, and Heman, are scriptural instances in proof of this assertion; and many like cases among

Christians in all ages have been recorded for the support and consolation of those who may be called upon to sail in these deep waters. Let them be directed, in this season of distress, to look back on the evidences, which they formerly gave of their faith in Christ and love to Him, when their minds were unclouded, and their lights were burning. And let them not pretend to judge of their state by what they may feel and think in a time of conflict, darkness, and temptation. There are many reasons *why* it may be thus with them, even though they *are* the Lord's People. Perhaps their faith is to be tried and proved: or some hidden corruption of the heart is to be discovered to them: or they are to be more sensibly taught the power and strength of sin, and the fury and malice of Satan: or they require some particular correction: or by a peculiar discipline are to be fitted for some peculiar service. For some of these, or for some other reasons, there is a need why they should be "in heaviness through manifold temptations." Then let them not be cast down as men without hope; nor suppose that some strange thing has happened unto them; nor conclude that their present sufferings are certain indications of the Lord's anger and of their own unrege-

nerate state. Rather let them hope in His mercy; and recollect that the Lord "loveth whom he chasteneth." Let them submit themselves under this heavy trial to His almighty and all-wise disposal: let them pray for strength to bear, and for grace to profit by their trials. Let them endeavour to possess their souls in patience; and to wait in humble faith, till this tyranny shall be overpast, and the Day Star shall arise in their heart.

Having thus separately stated and considered the different ways in which the Lamentation in the text may be understood in its spiritual application, I shall now conclude with a short address to Persons of a description not comprised in any which has been yet noticed. The persons to whom I allude, are those who on good grounds are conscious that these words in the text do *not* belong to them. Once perhaps they may have thought otherwise. The time may have been, when they were led to fear that their "Harvest was past," their "Summer was ended." But they have been brought to see such fears were vain. They have found that the Lord, in exciting these fears in their minds, was, in fact, most gracious and merciful to them; and by these very means was leading them to Himself. He

brought them into the Wilderness, that He might speak comfortably unto them. Their hope now is, that they "are saved:" that they have been translated out of a state of wrath and death into a state of peace and life: that they are reconciled unto God, have an interest in his favour now, and shall be made partakers of his happiness hereafter. And what are the grounds on which this hope is founded? It is founded on a consciousness of their having fled to Jesus Christ for refuge, of their having put their souls into his hands, and of their now daily living by faith on Him, in a watchful obedience to His Commands, and under the guidance and influence of His grace. It is founded on the Witness of the Spirit, who testifies to his own work of grace on the soul, enables those in whom He dwells to discern the sincerity of their own profession, and thus "bears witness with their spirit that they are the children of God." Happy are all those who, without self-deception or presumption, have within them these grounds of hope and joy. Let them however still remember, that it is only by perseverance in well-doing, and by growth in grace, that this hope is to be maintained and this joy increased. The present time, and whatever term of life may yet be continued to them,



are the Harvest, the Summer in which they must labour in the service and to the glory of Him, who hath called them into his Vineyard. It is by now bringing forth their fruit unto holiness, that they must prove themselves to be "Trees of Righteousness, the planting of the Lord." It is by now abounding in good works, that they must evince their gratitude, adorn their profession, and display their meetness for partaking the Inheritance of the Saints in light.

SERMON X.

THE FALL AND RECOVERY OF MAN.

ROMANS, v. 19.

For as by one man's disobedience many were made Sinners: so by the obedience of One shall many be made Righteous.

EVERY considerate person must be convinced, that man is at present in a fallen state. Comparing what he now is, with what at first he was, it is plain that he is far gone from original righteousness, and has lost the Image and Favour of his Maker. He is prone to evil and subject to decay, and bears evident marks of being under the Divine displeasure. On this review of the case, two Questions press on our notice. First, How did man fall into this state? Secondly, How can he be recovered from it? These are questions which reason never could have answered. It is Revelation alone which could answer them. And in

the Text we have a short, but plain reply to both. We are there told that "by one man's disobedience many were made Sinners;" on the other hand, "that by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." This is the account which the Scriptures give of the Fall and Recovery of man. — Let us separately consider the two particulars here stated.

I. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." The man here spoken of was Adam, the first man, the common Father of the human race. Like all the other works of God, he was originally good. He was created in "the Image of God*," holy, and happy, disposed to do God's will, capable of doing it, and finding his own happiness in doing it. And had he continued thus, we may justly presume that he would have enjoyed a blessed immortality. But he fell from this holy and happy state. He was guilty of disobedience. As a trial of his submission to the Divine Will, he had received from the Lord an express command not to eat of one particular tree in the Garden of Eden: and he had been threatened with instant death as the consequence of disobedience. The Lord had said unto him, "In the day that thou eatest

* Genesis, i. 27.

thereof, thou shalt surely die." * But notwithstanding this command, enforced by such a threat, Adam was disobedient. Forgetful of the many obligations, which he was under to believe, and love, and fear the Lord his God, he fell into the snare of the Devil, and ate of the fruit of the forbidden Tree. Judgement followed the act of disobedience. The sentence denounced against the transgression was executed. In the day that he ate thereof, he died. He immediately passed from life unto death. His body became subject to disease and corruption: his soul lost all spiritual life and feeling: and the whole man, both body and soul, was condemned to suffer the bitter pains of Eternal Death. What a dreadful change did Adam thus undergo! Instead of being the holy and happy creature, which he had so lately been, having pleasure in God, and confidence towards Him, and a hope full of immortality, he was suddenly become wicked and miserable, at enmity in his heart with the blessed God, a wretched outcast from the Divine Presence and favour, filled with shame, remorse, and terror, liable every instant to return to the dust from whence he came, and looking forward to nothing beyond the grave, but to great and endless

* Genesis, ii. 17.

punishment. Such were the wages of his sin, the fruit of his disobedience. — But the consequences did not end here. They were not confined to Adam. They reached to others also. "By this one man's disobedience many were made sinners." By Adam's transgression not only he himself was made a sinner, but *many* were made sinners; even all his posterity, as many as hereafter might spring from him. They were made sinners in two respects.

First, By being involved in his guilt and condemnation. Adam was not only the common Father of all his children, but, as such, their common representative also. Consequently they were deeply concerned and implicated in what he did. Being "yet in his loins"* when he by transgression fell, they also fell with him by the same transgression. His blood became as it were attainted, and all his posterity were involved in his sin, and sentence. St. Paul, in the verses before the text, fully and distinctly states this point. "By one man sin entered into the World, and Death by Sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that" (or, as we read in the margin of the Bible, *in whom*) "all have sinned." — And again, "by one man's offence death reigned by one;" — and

* Hebrews, vii. 9, 10.

again, "by the offence of one, judgement came upon all men to condemnation." Thus by Adam's disobedience all men were made sinners. They were regarded and treated as sinners, and became subject to the same condemnation. On no other ground but this, can we account for the sufferings, and death of infants. Death is the wages of sin: but we see those, who have never themselves committed sin, subject to death. As the Apostle expresses it, "death reigns even over them that have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression *;" that is, who have not themselves actually and personally sinned. But how could this be, if they were not involved in the guilt of his transgression? What power could Death have over them, if they were not conceived and born in sin, and by nature children of wrath? And, when, in the baptismal service of our Church, we pray that God would "mercifully look upon the child; — would deliver it from his wrath, — and grant to it remission of sins;" what wrath, what sins can be meant, but that wrath, and those sins, of which, as a descendant of Adam, it partakes? — This however is not the only way in which, by Adam's disobedience, many are made sinners. They were made so,

* Romans, v. 14.

Secondly, By receiving from him that corrupt and evil nature, which he had himself acquired. "A clean thing cannot come out of an unclean." "That which is born of the flesh is" and must be "flesh." Adam being himself deprived of spiritual life, could not impart it to his posterity. Having lost the image of God in his own soul, he could not transmit that image to his children. He could only "beget them in his own likeness, after his image," namely, in that depraved state of heart and nature, to which by his disobedience he had brought himself. And in this "image"* we are expressly told that he did beget them. Thus by his disobedience they were made sinners. They became "carnally minded," averse from God, from his holy law, service, and will; prone to idolatry, seeking their happiness in the creature instead of the Creator; setting their affections on things on earth, instead of on things in Heaven; serving divers lusts and pleasures; selfish, sensual, impatient, and refusing to humble themselves before God. Such have men naturally been ever since the fall. Such is the state of heart, which they inherit from their first parent, and bring with them into the world. Hence it is, that in the service of our Church be-

* Genesis, v. 3.

fore mentioned, we pray in behalf of the Child about to be baptised, that "the old Adam may be buried in him," and that "all carnal affections may die in him." How indeed can we account for the general wickedness of men's lives, but by ascribing it to the wickedness of their hearts? And to what other cause can we assign it, that they "are estranged from the womb, and go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies," but to this, that they "are shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin?"*

Such is the account which the Scriptures give of the Fall of Man. Let us now see what they say of his Recovery.

II. "By the obedience of One, many shall be made Righteous." The way in which men fall, and the way in which they are recovered, strongly resemble each other. As they fell in consequence of what another did for them, so they are recovered in consequence of what another has done for them. They were made sinners through the disobedience of Adam. They are made righteous through the obedience of Christ: for He is the "One" Person who is here spoken of, and who is therefore called "the Second Man," "the last Adam." In other respects, however, there is an infinite dif-

* Psalm lviii. 3. — li. 5.

ference between him and Adam. "The first man was of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from Heaven." * Adam was merely a man, 'of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting.' But Christ, though a perfect man, was at the same time far more than man; He was also God. In one person he joined the two natures, divine and human. He was at once Adam's child, and Adam's Maker. Adam's child according to the human nature, which, however, in consequence of the miraculous conception in the womb of a Virgin, partook not in his case of the original corruption; Adam's Maker according to the Divine Nature, by which He made the world, and created all things. Such is the Person, whom the Scriptures proclaim as the Recoverer of lost Mankind. "By *His* obedience many are made righteous." — As man fell through the disobedience of Adam, so they are recovered through the obedience of Christ. — Christ's obedience was a perfect obedience. "He fulfilled all righteousness." Having taken upon himself the form of a Servant, and so being made subject to the law, He in all points kept the law. He became obedient even unto Death, and that death, the death of the

* 1 Cor. xv. 45. 47.

Cross. By this obedience He makes many righteous, even all his Spiritual Seed, as many as by faith are joined unto Him, and become his people. — And here, also, the resemblance between their Fall and their Recovery is to be clearly traced. In the same respects in which they had been made sinners by Adam, in both they are made righteous by Christ.

First, by being delivered from guilt, and condemnation. Christ, like Adam, is the Head and Representative of all his people. Consequently they are deeply concerned in what he did. In fact, whatever he did or suffered, was for them, and in their stead, and they being one with him by faith, are thus complete in Him. As their surety, he suffered the penalty of sin, and satisfied the demands of the law. And hence we see how they are delivered from guilt, and condemnation. The law being satisfied by their surety, has no demands against them. He has redeemed them from the curse of the law, having "been made a curse for them;" so that, as the Apostle justly argues, "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." * — But this is not all. They who are made righteous by the obedience of Christ, are not only delivered from

* Gal. iii. 13. — Rom. viii. 1.

wrath, and punishment, but they are brought into a far better state, than that from which, by Adam's disobedience, they originally fell. "Not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead; much more the Grace of God, and the Gift by Grace, which is by one man Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many."* — Not only the guilt of Adam's sin is taken away from those who are in Christ; not only the numerous sins, which they themselves have actually committed, are forgiven (for "the free gift is of many offences unto justification"); but the obedience also of Christ is put to their account: and thus being "made the righteousness of God in Him," they are accepted, and dealt with, as if they were righteous in themselves. They have recovered a title to Eternal Life; a title, which, having been purchased for them by the obedience of Christ, is now effectually secured to them by the promise and oath of the Almighty. Justified by the blood of Jesus, and clothed in his righteousness, they "have a right to the Tree of Life†," from which the flaming sword, that turned every way to prevent Adam from approaching it, shall never drive them away: "for as by one man's offence,

* Romans, v. 15. 17. † Revelations, xxii. 14.

death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of Grace, and of the Gift of Righteousness, shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ."—But, further, there is still another respect in which, by the obedience of Christ, they are made righteous: for,

Secondly, They receive from Him a new and holy nature. As in Adam they had died, being sunk in spiritual death; so in Christ they are made alive, being raised to spiritual life. He quickens them when dead, creates them anew unto good works, which He has before ordained that they should walk in them; and daily by his grace maintains the life which he has given. Hence the most important and glorious change takes place in their hearts. They become "new creatures" in Christ. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."* They have new desires, and dispositions; new hopes, and fears; new ends, and motives; new ways, and works. They desire now to love God above all things: they delight in his holy will and service; set their affections on things above; and humble and condemn themselves. They are ashamed of their former evil ways; deny the corrupt inclin-

* 2 Corinthians, v. 17.

ations of their natural heart; and maintain a constant struggle with "the old man," with the remains of sin and lust in their hearts. The victory indeed is not always decidedly in their favour. Too often corruption prevails. Too often they "find a law in their members warring against the law of their mind." Too often they have need to lament, that "when they would do good, evil is present with them." But still on the whole they maintain a successful warfare. On the whole, notwithstanding occasional falls, or sometimes possibly even more grievous declensions, it is evident that they have been born again of the Spirit, and have been, in part at least, renewed to that image of God, which Adam originally lost, "in righteousness and true holiness."

Such is the account which Revelation sets before us of the Fall and Recovery of man; of his Fall in Adam, of his Recovery by Christ. And why does it set before us this account? That it may gratify our curiosity? That it may puff us up with vain and empty knowledge? No; but that it may make us wise unto salvation. The Scriptures tell us these things, that we may make a profitable use of them; that, receiving them with humility, meekness, and faith, we may personally apply them to ourselves, and save our souls alive.

Let us remember then, my brethren, that we are every one of us deeply and personally concerned in these truths, which have been explained. We are all of us the guilty seed of fallen Adam, involved in his condemnation, and begotten in his image; born in sin, and the children of wrath. This is our state by nature. We are prone indeed to deny that this is our state; while the very pride, that leads us to deny it, proves beyond a doubt that it is so. What indeed can be more absurd than to deny what the experience of every day confirms? Did you not bring with you into the world a body liable from its very birth to pain, to sickness, and to death? Did you not bring with you a soul disposed to evil, unholy and impure, seeking its happiness from the world, and having no delight in God? Call to mind what has been the state of your heart, in infancy, in childhood, in youth, in riper age; what has been the bent of your thoughts, your intentions, and dispositions? what has been the object of your desires, affections, and pursuits, in all these different periods of your life? Like Adam before the Fall, have you loved God with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength? Or rather, like Adam after the Fall, have you not secretly disliked God,

and have counted his laws severe and hard? And what have your actual transgressions been? Can you deny that these have been many, and great? Can you deny that, from your childhood to the present moment, you have been a sinner, a transgressor continually of God's holy law; either in thought, word, or deed, doing something which He hath forbidden to be done, or leaving undone something which He hath commanded you to do? Can you name that day, or that hour, in which you have not thus yourself "sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression?" I make this appeal to your own conscience; and I would now leave it to yourself to decide, whether you are not, by nature and by practice, a sinner under condemnation. Be assured that this is your state. It is of the greatest consequence that you should feel it to be so: for till you are deeply sensible of what you have lost through the First Man, you will never really be the better for what you may gain through the Second. Blessed be the rich mercy of God! the Obedience of Christ has abundantly compensated for the Disobedience of Adam. It is true, you are fallen in Adam, but not without remedy. You may rise again in Christ. You may be recovered from the consequences of the Fall,

and advanced to higher happiness and glory, than if those consequences had never been entailed upon you. You may be delivered from guilt and condemnation. You may be dealt with as righteous, be renewed to the Divine Image, and exalted to heavenly places. Whether this blessed and glorious change shall be wrought in you or not, is the interesting point on which you must here decide. This is the question now submitted to your choice, Will you die eternally in Adam, or will you live eternally in Christ? The command which the Gospel gives you is this: "Believe in Christ, and live." The disobedience of Adam will not ruin your soul, unless you continue yourself disobedient to this heavenly command. If you obey it, then the obedience of Christ will be your's. "Being justified by faith, you shall have peace with God," and being joined to Christ by faith, you shall be "one spirit with the Lord." Thus your sins shall be fully pardoned; your persons completely justified; your natures renewed to holiness, in part in this world, and perfectly in the world to come, where "an entrance shall be administered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." — But if you continue disobedient to this evangelical com-

mand, if you persist in refusing to believe in Christ and to be saved by Him, you must endure the consequences which such a disobedient and rebellious spirit necessarily brings with it. You must endure all the curse and misery which sin unpardoned and unmortified entails. You must endure all these things under the still heavier and more aggravated charge of having wilfully preferred darkness to light, death to life, hell to heaven: of having contemptuously set at nought all the counsels of God, despising the mercy and loving-kindness of the Father, trampling under foot the blood of the Son, and doing despite unto the Spirit of Grace.—Choose then, this day, what ye will do. Life, and Death, — the Blessing, and the Curse — are set before you. May the Lord make you willing in the day of his power to obey his call! May He incline your heart, while it is called to-day, to make that holy and happy choice of which in this world you will never repent, and for which in the world to come you will never cease to render everlasting songs of Praise and Joy!

SERMON XI.

THE WORLD AND THE CHRISTIAN.

1 PETER, iv. 4, 5.

Wherein they think it strange, that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you; who shall give account to Him, that is ready to judge the Quick and the Dead.

THE world and the Christian can never cordially agree. The Christian does not love the world, and the world dislikes the Christian. Not doing as the children of the world do, and governed by principles to which they are strangers, he is first misunderstood, and then misrepresented. They look upon his singularity as the effect of pride, of folly, or of hypocrisy; and, feeling how severely his conduct condemns their own, they attempt to satisfy and defend themselves by vilifying and condemning him. And, for a time, the attempt may

succeed. But their triumph will be short. A day is appointed in which God will judge the world in righteousness; in which He will roll away every reproach from his people, and will expose and condemn his enemies and their's.

Such are the important Truths of which we are reminded in the text. St. Peter, writing to the persecuted Christians, whom he describes as being "redeemed from their vain conversation," and "no longer living to the lusts of men, but to the will of God," thus addresses them in respect to those persons, from whose friendship, company, and practices they had now separated themselves; "wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you; who shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the Quick and the Dead."

In discoursing on this passage, let us advert to the different particulars contained in it.

I. Let us notice the Change, which Christianity had made in the conduct of the persons to whom the Apostle writes. We find, from the verse before the text, that they had formerly "wrought the will of the Gentiles." Before their conversion to Christianity, they had lived as heathens;

when they had "walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries." But now, since they had become Christians, they no longer "ran to the same excess of riot." A great and an evident change had taken place in their conduct. They no longer lived in the practice of those sins, in which, during their unconverted state, they had taken so much pleasure; and in which those, who remained in an unconverted state, still continued to delight. They had broken off their evil habits; had forsaken their wicked companions; had renounced the hidden things of darkness: instead of being riotous, disorderly, licentious characters, as they had once been, they were become sober, chaste, and serious; and thus were altogether walking in newness of life. Such was the change which Christianity had produced in the conduct of these persons; and such is the Change which real Christianity will always produce in the conduct of its true followers. For real Christianity (be it remembered) makes a man "a new creature." It works in him an inward, an entire, an abiding change. It renews the soul to the Divine Image and likeness, which it lost by the fall of Adam. It puts into the heart new desires and hopes

and fears; so that the man acts from motives and principles to which he was formerly a stranger. "Old things are past away; behold all things are become new." —But if such be the change produced by Christianity, in the inner man, there will, doubtless be a corresponding Change produced in the outer man. When the heart is new, the life also will be new. A change of motives will produce a change of conduct. This Change indeed may differ in circumstances, but still it will be the same in reality. A man may not have led a life so openly dissolute as the persons in the text; and consequently, on his becoming a true Christian, the Change in his conduct may not be so striking and obvious: but still, in many respects, he may be leading a new life; and in his daily behaviour, may be giving very convincing proofs of the Change which has taken place in his heart. Whatever his professions might be, before he became a true Christian, he yet, in some way or other, "wrought the will of the Gentiles." In some way or other he walked after the course of this world, and trod in the same steps with other unconverted persons. But now, "being born again of the Spirit," and "created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works," he no longer walks after

this course, nor treads in these steps. Being "transformed by the renewing of his mind," he is "no longer conformed to this world." He no longer governs his conduct by the principles, maxims, and customs of the world, but by the dictates of a tender conscience, enlightened by the Spirit and the Word of God.

II. Let us observe the way in which this Change of conduct in the Christian converts was treated by the ungodly world. "They think it *strange*" (says St. Peter in the text) "that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you." The alteration which had taken place in the conduct of these Christians, was altogether a mystery to their irreligious neighbours. They could not account for the surprising Change, which they witnessed. 'Look,' (they would say to themselves and to each other,) 'Look at these people. They were 'lately as fond of pleasure and riot as our-'selves. It was but the other day that 'they were as forward and eager as any 'person to join in banquetings, revellings, 'and such like things. But now what a 'change has taken place! They will have 'nothing to do with any thing of this kind. 'They condemn it. They avoid it. They 'affect to dislike it. They shun the places

'where these practices occur. They separate themselves from the company of those 'persons who engage in them. What a 'mystery is this! How unaccountable is 'their conduct! To what cause can it be 'owing, that they should thus refuse to do 'as all others do, and should willingly give 'up pleasures to which they themselves 'were formerly so much attached?' — Thus we may suppose that these unconverted persons would think within themselves, and would express their astonishment at the conduct of the Christian Converts. And thus in all ages have unconverted persons thought on this subject. The conduct of religious people has always been a matter of wonder and surprise to the irreligious. Doubtless the sinners before the Flood thought it *strange* that Noah should lay out his time, his strength, and his property, in preparing what appeared to them so useless a structure as the Ark. Doubtless the Egyptians thought it *strange* that Moses should "refuse to be called the Son of Pharaoh's Daughter," and should "choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," than to share the pleasures and riches of a Court. Doubtless the Jews and Gentiles thought it *strange* that St. Paul and the other Apostles should encounter so many

difficulties, and expose themselves to so many reproaches and dangers, in their zeal for propagating the Gospel. The same is the case at present. The true Christian is still "a wonder unto many." His conduct still appears *strange* to those who have the name of Christians, but know nothing of the power of Christianity. His non-conformity to the spirit of the world, his abstinence from worldly pleasures, his moderation in worldly pursuits, his refusal to comply with worldly maxims and customs, are parts of his character, which worldly men cannot at all understand, and which, therefore, they regard as surprising and mysterious. But there is nothing really wonderful in the matter; and that irreligious persons should think otherwise, only betrays their ignorance of real religion, and of the principles by which the true Christian is governed. When these are seen and understood, his conduct with respect to the world, will appear to be natural and consistent; and the only wonder will be, if he should act otherwise than he really does. Take, for example, the case of the Christians in the text. They no longer ran to the same excess of riot, to which before their conversion to Christianity they had been accustomed to run. Was there any thing *strange* in

this? Consider in what light they now regarded those revellings and banquetings, in which they had formerly delighted. They now looked upon them as so many occasions and instruments of sin. They considered them as some of the most successful means, by which Satan maintains his kingdom in the world. They regarded them as the places where the enemies of God find their greatest pleasure, and tempt others to wickedness. They viewed them as scenes, which stir up fleshly lusts, and, by gratifying sinful inclinations, increase their power over the soul. How then was it possible, that with these views they could "run to the same excess of riot" as they once did? Taught by the Holy Spirit to know and to love God, having their eyes opened to see the evil and the danger of sin, being baptised into Christ, and enlisted under his banner to fight against the Devil, the World, and the Flesh, how was it possible that they could any longer frequent the places and scenes of carnal and licentious mirth; where the slaves of the Devil, of the World, and of the Flesh, find their chief gratifications? "Redeemed from their vain conversation by the precious blood of Christ," it would have been *strange* indeed, if they could still have "fashioned

themselves according to their former lusts in their ignorance." Here would have been the wonder; not that they should renounce and forsake the works of darkness; but that if, after having been once savingly enlightened, they could have retained any further fellowship or communion with them. This at least is the view, which every person who feels the constraining influence of Christianity on his heart, will have of the subject. Such a person will clearly see, that when these Converts refrained from running to the same excess of riot with unconverted persons, they only exhibited the natural and necessary consequence of their Conversion to Christianity; and that if they had not refrained from doing this, they would have shown themselves, notwithstanding their profession of Christianity, to have been no true Christians. "For what communion hath light with darkness? What concord hath Christ with Belial?" It appears then that there was no just cause for that wonder, which their conduct excited in their ungodly neighbours. These thought it *strange;* but it was merely their own ignorance of Christianity which made them think it so. — Let such as are disposed to wonder at the holy and self-denying conduct of religious people, and to look upon them as persons beside

themselves, lay this truth to heart. The wonder which they feel, proves that they themselves are strangers to true religion, and that by whatever name they may be called, they are all still Gentiles in heart.

But we have hitherto considered only one part of that treatment which the Christian Converts in the text met with from the irreligious world. They were not only misunderstood, but they were also misrepresented. Their unconverted neighbours not only thought their conduct strange, but they also "*spake evil of them.*" Not understanding their real motives and principles, they imputed to them false ones. They said that they were actuated by pride, by self-conceit, by a vain desire of appearing better or wiser than other people. They represented them as hypocrites, deceivers, enthusiasts; reviled them; reproached them; defamed their characters; magnified every little error which they committed; spread false and malicious reports respecting them; turned them into ridicule, and held them up as objects of contempt and scorn. Such, we may conclude, was the way in which these Gentiles treated the Christians, when it is said, that they "spake evil of them." And we may the more readily conclude so, because this is the way, in which irreligious

people have, at all times, treated the serious followers of Jesus Christ. They have thus, more or less, spoken evil of them. Jesus Christ himself was "set for a sign which should be spoken against*;" and the disciple is not above his master. If the world spake evil, as we know it did, of Jesus Christ, it is to be expected that it will speak evil of those who walk in his steps: and it *does* speak evil of them every day. Let a man be ever so profane, or immoral, a common swearer, or drunkard, an unkind father, a bad husband, a despiser of all religion, yet the world will, in general, give itself but little trouble about such a man. He may go on in his own way, and provided that he does not provoke the vengeance of the laws, little will be said against him. But let that man renounce his sins and sinful practices; let him become a true Christian, a meek and holy follower of the blessed Jesus; and how many mouths will be opened against him! how many tongues will be ready to speak evil of him! Let his life be ever so exemplary and useful, still slander will be busy against him; and many who dare not speak openly to his prejudice, will endeavour secretly to injure his character: so that, in this respect at least, "all that will live godly

* Luke, iii. 34.

in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." * What a striking proof is this of the corruption and depravity of our nature, of the desperate wickedness of man's heart, of the enmity of the carnal mind against God! How spontaneously must men, in their natural state, hate holiness, and the divine image, that thus so soon as a small trace and resemblance of it may appear, they should instantly begin to speak evil of, and revile it! How cordially must they love the work and service of Satan, and how anxiously desire to support his cause and kingdom, when, so soon as any one of his wretched captives shall begin to throw off his chains, and to renounce his service, they should with one voice conspire to belie, defame, reproach, and ridicule him! Men may talk of their love of virtue, and boast of the goodness of their hearts; but their hard and evil speeches against God's people prove that they are still "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Let those whose consciences accuse them on this head, lay this conclusion seriously to heart. Let them reflect on the load of guilt which they may have already brought on themselves by these practices. Let them also reflect on what will be the consequences of their sin. This

* 2 Tim. iii. 12.

is another particular to be noticed in the text.

III. They "shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead." Men may think, that their ignorance of religion, and their emnity against it; that the wonder which they feel at the conduct of godly persons, and the evil speeches which they utter against them, are matters of no consequence, and will never be brought to remembrance. But the Apostle assures them of the contrary. They must "give an account" of these things to God. When the Lord shall come to judgement, he will make a strict enquiry into the motives of their conduct, and will publicly expose their guilt. He will call upon them to justify what they have done, and said; to account for the false, the bitter, the malicious speeches which they have made against Himself and his people. For what has been spoken against them, in consequence of their attachment to his cause or of their resemblance to his image, He will consider as having been spoken against Himself. All the sneers, reproaches, and falsehoods, which have thus been uttered, will be remembered and produced; while those who have uttered them, will be required to prove their words, and to show the truth

and justice of their accusations. But in that day they will be speechless. They, who have been so forward to open their mouths, and to speak evil of their righteous neighbours, will then have nothing to say. Conscious guilt will close their lips. Convicted and confounded, they will stand before the Judge, and in dreadful silence will await the tremendous sentence which will assign them for ever to the place of punishment. That such will be the doom of these persons, has been long foretold by the Word of Truth. St. Jude tells us that "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his Saints, to execute judgement upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their *hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.*"* Let not these solemn truths be lost upon us. Let those, who are disposed and perhaps accustomed to speak evil of religious persons, take warning in due time. You will one day be called to account for your ungodly speeches. Remember the Lord *is ready* to judge the Quick and the Dead. The day is fixed in the counsels

* Jude, 14, 15.

of God. Every hour is bringing it nearer. Think how much guilt you may have already contracted. Add not to your present load by further offences. Let fear prevent you from speaking evil of God and of his people. Those, whose conduct appears strange to you, whom you would revile or ridicule, are the Children, the Beloved of God: and will He not avenge their cause? In assaulting, in persecuting, in speaking evil of them, you are kicking against the pricks: you are injuring, wounding, destroying yourselves. Cease from such a fruitless warfare with the King of kings. Throw down your arms, and instead of opposing Him, become yourselves his willing subjects. Lay aside your enmity. Implore his pardon. Seek reconciliation with Him. Join yourselves to his despised, but happy flock. He will yet receive you graciously. He will blot out all your iniquities. He will regard you with the favour, which He beareth towards his people; and will give you to know the felicity of his chosen.

But especially, let this subject be applied to those, who make something more of a Religious Profession than others; who say that they fear God, believe in Christ Jesus, and are desirous of living according to his Gospel. My Brethren, you see in the text,

that it is your Duty not to run to the same excess of riot with others. It is your Duty to keep at a distance from those sinful and sensual practices in which wicked and worldly men find their delight. If, indeed, you really are what you profess to be, if you are true Christians, you will yourselves be unwilling to join in these things; you will feel a distaste, a disrelish for them. Your own inclination will lead you to abstain from them. But think not, on this account, that the admonition is less necessary or less seasonable. You may be induced, even against your own inclination, to do as others do, and to join with them in their sins. You may be over-persuaded by their entreaties; or, what is more likely, you may be prevailed on, from the fear of provoking their anger or their ridicule, to act contrary to your conscience and your desires. You know that if you thus dare to be singular, you will probably be evil spoken of. When your neighbours, and former friends, perhaps your late companions in sin, see you forsaking their company and practices, you are aware that probably they will revile you, and laugh at you, and raise some evil report against you. And at the thoughts of these things your heart is ready to fail. Rather than encounter them, you will perhaps conform a little to the ways

of the world, and thus, to avoid the Cross, will even *seem* at least to run with others to the same excess of riot. It is this temptation against which you stand in need of being seriously warned. Remember, that as the Servants and Disciples of Jesus Christ, you must take up your Cross and come after Him. You are not allowed to choose your way, but you must follow Him in the path of Duty "through evil report and good report." Neither the entreaties of friends nor the threatenings of enemies will allow of your stepping aside to the right hand or to the left. You must go straight forward, and thus prove that you indeed are what you seem and declare yourselves to be. It is a great part of that salvation in which you profess to share, to be delivered from this present evil world; and you must show that you *are* delivered from it, by separating yourselves from worldly practices, and from those sinful pleasures, in which the men of this world seek their enjoyment. By a contrary conduct, by joining with them in these things, you will countenance them in sin, will disgrace your profession, and will wound your own peace. See, then, what is your Duty, and practise it. Run not with others to the same excess of riot. Regard not what they may think or say of you.

Let them deem your conduct strange; let them, if so disposed, speak evil of you. By so doing they hurt themselves, not you. Let it be your care to return them good for evil. Pray for them. Pray that they also may be recovered from their vain conversation, may cast aside the works of darkness, and may walk in newness of life. Let your example reprove them; but let your behaviour towards them be kind and gentle. So shall you approve yourselves to be the followers of the mild and holy Jesus, partakers of his spirit, and heirs of his glory. In a word, adorn the Gospel by a meek, godly, and consistent conduct, and "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

SERMON XII.

THE NATURE OF SIN, REPENTANCE, AND PARDONING MERCY, ILLUSTRATED IN THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE, XV. 32.

It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found.

THE proud heart of the unrenewed man is ever at variance with the humbling grace of the Gospel. He looks upon the offer of free, unmerited mercy, when made to himself, as degrading and insulting; when extended to others, as partial and unjust. Nothing, however, can be more absurd and indefensible than such a conduct: and it was chiefly with the view of exposing and condemning it, that the Parable of the Prodigal Son, from which the text is taken, was originally spoken. The unreasonable behaviour of the elder Brother, in being

offended with his kind and compassionate Father, for showing favour to the returning Prodigal, exhibited a striking specimen of the unreasonable conduct of the Pharisees in taking offence at our Lord for calling notorious sinners to repentance, and for holding out to them encouraging assurances of acceptance and forgiveness; whilst in the condescending and forcible expostulations of the father with his offended son, Jesus intended to convey a defence and justification of his own conduct, and to show its propriety in itself, as well as its suitableness to the great purpose for which he was come into the world. "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found."

Such appears to have been the *general* design of this most beautiful and instructive portion of Scripture. But there are other important particulars contained in it; and we shall not make an unprofitable use of the parable, if we consider the light which it casts on *three* interesting points: namely,

I. The Nature and Consequences of Sin.

II. The Nature and Effects of true Scriptural Repentance.

III. The Readiness of God to receive and pardon the Penitent Offender.

I. Let us begin with the first. We read at the eleventh verse of the Chapter, that "a certain man had two sons. And the "youngest of them said to his father, Father, "give me the portion of goods that falleth "to me. And he divided unto them his "living. And not many days after the "younger son gathered all together, and "took his journey into a far country, and "there wasted his substance with riotous "living. And when he had spent all, there "arose a mighty famine in that land; and "he began to be in want; and he went "and joined himself to a citizen of that "country; and he sent him into the fields "to feed swine; and he would fain have "filled his belly with the husks that the "swine did eat: and no man gave unto "him."

In this passage we are strongly reminded of the Nature and Consequences of Sin.

Let us observe the character and conduct of this young man. Living in the house of his indulgent father, he knew not the want of any thing which was good and proper for him. If, as we find from another part of the parable, the hired servants were so well taken care of, and so plentifully supplied, we may be sure that the Son was not neglected. He was treated with kind-

ness, and abundantly provided with every thing which could reasonably contribute to his comfort and happiness. But amidst all these advantages, he was restless and uneasy. The sober, rational enjoyments of his Father's family did not suit his turn of mind. He found them dull and insipid, and he sighed after other amusements and pleasures more suited to his taste. The godly discipline, and pious restraints, under which he lived at home, were irksome to him. He wished to be rid of them. He longed to be his own master, and to follow his own inclinations; and knowing that he could never do thus so long as he was under his Father's eyes, he was desirous of getting at a distance from him, that so his conduct might not be overlooked, nor his enjoyments interrupted by officious and unseasonable admonitions. Thus, we may suppose, he thought with himself. And at length, determining to put his wishes into execution, he obtained from his Father, probably under some false pretence of entering into trade, or of improving himself by travelling, that portion of goods which was intended for him: and losing no further time, he gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country. There he gave the reins to his evil inclinations; drove from his

mind all remembrance of his indulgent Father; forgot his pious instructions; thought not of the pain which he would feel, should the tidings of his Son's misconduct reach him; and freed from all restraints of this kind, pursued his pleasure with greediness, and became altogether sunk in fleshly and sensual lusts.

See here a lively picture of what Sin is, and of the way in which the Sinner thinks and acts. He might be happy in the family and favour of his heavenly Father. He is invited to choose the ways of religion, and is assured that he shall find them to be the ways of pleasantness and peace. He is told on the authority of Him who is Truth itself, that if he will fear God and keep his commandments, the consequence will be, that he shall want no manner of thing that is good. — But he has no mind to these things. His inclinations run another way. The reasonable restraints, which religion imposes on him, appear to him grievous and oppressive. The light and easy yoke of God's service, seems to him an intolerable burden. He desires to be his own master, and to follow the devices and desires of his own heart. Hence he tries to get at a distance from God. He puts away serious thoughts; stifles the voice of conscience; turns a deaf

ear to the admonitions of his minister or of his pious friends; and thus, in fact, says in his heart to the Almighty, "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Thus freed from restraints, and casting the fear of God behind him, he pursues the course to which his own depraved disposition leads him, and walks after the counsel of his own will. — Not that he necessarily runs the same particular way with the Prodigal, and wastes his substance in riotous living. There are many ways of Sin besides this. The broad road of destruction has in it many paths. The sinner may not be sunk into sensuality and vice. His temptations may not be of this kind. His inclinations may not require this sort of gratification. But still, in some way or other, he serves sin, and walks after the course of this present evil world. He forgets God, and minds earthly things. He is wholly taken up in the pursuit or enjoyment of temporal objects; in gratifying the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life; in seeking his happiness in the creature instead of in the Creator; in making provision for the body, to the utter neglect of the soul and of eternity.

Such is the *Nature* of Sin. Attend next to its *Consequences*. What did the Prodigal

bring on himself by his foolish and wicked conduct? Distress, disgrace, and ruin. This was all the fruit which he reaped from his sin and folly. For a time indeed he enjoyed himself, and took his pleasure. But this was soon over. He soon squandered away his substance and brought himself to want. It happened, too, at the same time, that there arose a mighty famine in that land. This circumstance would greatly add to his distress. Without money, without friends, (for they who pretended a friendship for him, so long as his money lasted, would now of course forsake him,) in a foreign country, at a long distance from home, his affliction must have been great. But what course did he take? Did he think of returning to his father? Pride forbade him to have such a thought. He would sooner endure any hardship, than be put to so much shame. Therefore, to keep himself from starving, he entered into service; and was employed by his master in feeding swine. But his misery did not end here. Notwithstanding his engagement, he was ill supplied with food. A stranger and unprotected, he could get no redress. From the severity of the famine, and from a recollection, perhaps, of his former extravagance, he met with no kindness from any

quarter. "No man gave unto him." Insomuch, that to satisfy the cravings of hunger, he was glad to eat of the very husks with which the swine were fed. What a reverse, what a change, did he now experience! Was this all the fruit which he had gained by leaving his father's house, and following his own inclinations? Such is always the Consequence of Sin. Its pleasures are but for a season. It surely brings with it, in its train, distress, disgrace, and ruin. The sinner may for a time go on without feeling fear or trouble. But the wrath of God secretly abideth on him. The curse of sin hangs over him, and may daily fall on his guilty and defenceless head. How often do we see men "eating the fruit of their own ways, and filled with their own devices!" Perhaps disease, the evident consequence of their transgression, lays hold of them. Perhaps shame and infamy, the natural effects of their evil courses, overwhelm them. Or if they do not bear about them these plain and obvious marks of Divine displeasure, yet, in that restless anxiety and bitter disappointment, which always accompany the pursuit of worldly happiness, they are taught the folly and wickedness of having "forsaken God, the Fountain of living Waters, and of having hewn

out to themselves broken cisterns, which can hold no water." Does the sinner, however, generally profit by these things? Does he generally look upon them as the Consequences of his transgressions? and is he prevailed on, by them, to renounce his ungodly courses, and return to his heavenly Father? Alas! the hardening nature of sin! the carnal enmity of the human mind to God and holiness! Instead of being brought back by chastisements to the path of duty, man under the afflicting rod too often seeks only how he may get at a further distance from God. Past disappointments, instead of convincing him of the vanity of these pursuits, only increase his eagerness after them, and urge him to fresh and greater efforts. Thus he becomes still more and more enslaved to sinful habits. Sin acquires a stronger power over him. Blinded by the god of this world, he pursues his ungodly course, without remorse or fear, and is every day treasuring up for himself a greater measure of wrath against the day of wrath. How sad and lamentable a condition is this! The Poor Prodigal, feeding on the husks, and expecting almost daily to perish with hunger, does not present so miserable a sight to the bodily eye, as such a poor deluded sinner, enslaved to sin, and

ready to perish eternally, offers to the spiritual eye.

Let us now consider,

II. The Nature and Effects of true Scriptural Repentance, as they are set before us in this Parable. We read of the Prodigal, that "when he came to himself, he said, "'How many hired servants of my father "have bread enough, and to spare, and I "perish with hunger! I will arise and go "unto my father, and will say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and "before thee, and am no more worthy to "be called thy son; make me as one of "thy hired servants.' And he arose and "came to his father." Extreme want, and the prospect of being starved to death, at length brought the Prodigal to his senses, humbled his pride, and led him to see and to own his guilt and misery. "He came to himself." Hitherto he had been acting the part of a fool and a madman. Under the idea of pursuing his pleasures, he had been injuring and destroying himself. This truth he now discovered; and comparing his present wretched state, with the happiness which he once enjoyed at home; nay, reflecting that the meanest servant in his Father's house was plentifully supplied, had bread enough and to spare, while he,

the once favoured happy son, was ready to perish with hunger, he deeply felt and lamented his folly and guilt. The remembrance of his father's kindness touched his heart; while the recollection of his own base ingratitude, filled him with remorse and shame. But in the midst of these distressing thoughts, a ray of hope broke in. The very remembrance of his father's kindness, which pierced him to the soul, yet raised an idea in his mind that possibly he might yet receive him, and at least might save him from perishing. This idea, once raised, is cherished as his only hope. He says, "I will arise and go to my Father." 'I will acknowledge my transgressions, I 'will confess my unworthiness. I cannot 'dare to ask that he will receive me as 'his son; but peradventure he may put 'me among his hired servants.' And he arose and went. The way was long. He had come into a far country. He was ill provided for the journey, and would be forced to beg his bread on the road. As he drew nearer home, doubts and fears would greatly agitate him. Shame would often be ready to stop and turn him back. The dread of the ridicule which his present appearance would excite, in those who had known him in his better days, would often

cause him to faulter by the way. Above all, the apprehension of his father's just reproaches, the thoughts of his angry countenance, would at times fill him with dismay and terror. But still, if he go not forward, whither *can* he go? If his Father, his Father once so loving and so kind, will not receive him, who *will* receive him? Can it be possible that such a Father should not receive him? These thoughts again revive his spirits: and with trembling steps and an anxious heart, he still pursues his journey.

Behold in this relation a clear description of the feelings and conduct of the repenting sinner. He, too, has "come to himself." By the grace of God he has recovered his senses, and is restored to his right mind; for so long as men are living without God in the world, with all their boasted wisdom they are but fools and madmen. Blind to their true interest, they are acting in the most unreasonable manner, and are only hurting and destroying themselves. But the person of whom we are speaking, the sinner who has been brought by grace to see himself, has been greatly changed. His eyes have been opened. The Spirit of God, whose gracious office it is to convince the world of sin, has awakened him to a sense of his wickedness and misery.

He now knows and feels that he is a sinner: and he trembles to think of the guilt which he has brought upon his soul. He sees the judgement to which he stands exposed, and anxiously looks around him for some way to escape. But where shall he find one? His talents have been wasted; his opportunities have been lost; years and years he has lived in sin, adding daily to the number of his transgressions, and increasing the power of sin in his heart. How keenly does he now feel, how deeply does he lament, his past folly, his present misery! How earnestly does he now wish to be found among the people of God; among those whom he has hitherto despised, and not improbably has condemned and vilified! 'They' (he cries), 'They are happy. They are at peace with 'God. They walk in his ways, and feel 'themselves safe under his wings. They 'have in Him a Friend, a Father, a Saviour, 'in whom they can confide. But as for 'me, I have not served God, nor walked in 'his ways. I have not even had Him to 'any good purpose in my thoughts. I have 'displeased and provoked Him. I have in-'curred a just condemnation. I must stand 'before his judgement-seat to receive my 'sentence. What shall I do?'

Thus the convinced and humbled sinner

reasons with himself, and deplores his state. But his case, though bad, is not desperate. There is yet a way of Escape for him. The Gospel of Christ still discloses a way, by which he may be restored to peace and happiness. It offers comfort to those who mourn. It speaks "glad tidings to the poor, liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." It proclaims in his ears the gracious purpose for which the Son of God came into the world, namely, to save sinners; and the merciful invitations by which he calls on all to come to him for rest. The sinner hears this glorious sound. He perceives that there is mercy with God in Christ, for even the chief of sinners. He begins to think whether there may not be mercy for *him*. The thought inspires him with something like a hope. 'At least' (he cries), 'I will make 'an effort. I will take with me words, and 'turn unto the Lord. I will break off from 'my evil habits. I will renounce my sinful 'pleasures, my unlawful gains. I will have 'nothing more to do with worldly and 'wicked men. They may revile, reproach, 'or ridicule me. But I will not be deterred 'by such things. I will seek after God. 'I will confess my sins. I will plead his 'promises in Jesus Christ. I will urge

'the sufficiency of his atoning sacrifice for 'all my sins. Though I cannot presume to 'hope for the children's bread, yet who can 'tell, but that I may be allowed to share 'the crumbs under the table. At least I 'will try and pray, and wait and seek: 'and if I do perish, it shall be at mercy's 'gate.' Such are his sentiments; and with these his conduct agrees. In this way, he arises and goes to his Heavenly Father. Many difficulties, indeed, lie in his way. Many things help to keep him back. Shame often stops his prayers; and a sense of guilt weighs down his spirits. At times he is full of doubts, and ready to give up all as lost. He fears that God will not receive him. The Lord has mercy for others; but has He any for so great a sinner? Then hope once more revives, and the gracious promises of Scripture excite him to fresh exertions. "Perplexed, he is not in despair; cast down, he is not destroyed." He waits upon the Lord in all the appointed ways: and while he trembles before Him, yet hopes and trusts in his mercy.

Let us now proceed to the third point remaining to be considered; namely,

III. The Readiness of God to receive and pardon the Penitent Offender.

This we are taught in the reception of

the Prodigal by his Father. We read, that "when he was yet a great way off, his Fa-"ther saw him, and had compassion, and "ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. "And the son said unto him, Father, I "have sinned against heaven and before "thee, and am no more worthy to be called "thy son. But the Father said to his "servants, Bring forth the best robe and "put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, "and shoes on his feet, and bring hither "the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us "eat and be merry. For this my son was "dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and "is found."

Every circumstance here mentioned shows, in the clearest manner, the mercy and kindness of this tender-hearted Father. He sees his returning son, *when yet a great way off.* He no sooner sees him, but, forgetting all his guilt, he only feels *compassion* for his present sufferings. Regardless of his own age and dignity, he *runs* to meet him, and, instead of upbraiding him with his faults, *falls on his neck, and kisses him.* Yea, when the son was proceeding, as he had said he would do, bitterly to condemn himself, the Father stops his self-reproaches, and notwithstanding his mean appearance, instantly owns him for his son, and by every

possible and appropriate expression testifies the joy which he feels at his return.

Thus God receives the penitent offender, who comes to him in the name of Jesus Christ. He sees afar off the first relenting of the heart, the first disposition of the soul to relent and turn to Him; and He sees it with favour and delight. "He looketh upon men: and if any say, I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not, He will deliver his soul from going into the pit." * When He hears "Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned I repented; and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth:" In what language did the Lord notice this self-condemned penitent? "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him. I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." † The

* Job, xxxiii. 27, 28.

† Jeremiah, xxxi. 18, 19, 20.

divine conduct, as displayed in this passage, is a direct counterpart to that of the father's in the parable. The Lord deals with repentant Ephraim, as the father deals with his returning prodigal. He gives him a name and a place among his children.

And so He deals with every repentant sinner. He receives him graciously. He forgives him freely. He puts him among his children. When the heart is broken and contrite, when it cries for mercy, and pleads nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ in its favour; then the controversy between God and the sinner is over. The sinner submits to the righteousness of God: and the Lord, who delighteth in mercy, can then show mercy to him, consistently with his other glorious perfections. The breach is healed. Peace is restored. The sinner is pardoned and accepted in the Beloved: and all the glorious blessings and privileges of the Gospel, the Children's portion, are conferred upon him. "The Lord is merciful to his unrighteousness: his sins and his iniquities He *remembers no more.*"

What gracious, what comfortable, what encouraging words to every penitent sinner; to every soul, which, convinced of its guilt, and feeling its distance from God, longs to

be forgiven, to be brought nigh to Him, and restored to His favour!

If there be any among us who answer this description; who, through God's grace, have come to themselves; who find their sins their burden; who are praying for mercy and acceptance through Jesus Christ; O, let them rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for there is joy on their account, in the presence of the angels of God. The Lord whom they are seeking, is nigh unto them. He doth not despise their broken and contrite heart. He sees their tears; He hears their sighs; He witnesses their self-condemnation; and with open arms, He is ready to receive them. Let them remember that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Let them plead the merit of this blood in prayer. Let them rely with faith on its cleansing efficacy: and in due time, they shall find rest unto their soul.

But while the subject, which we have been thus considering, gives this great encouragement to penitent and humbled sinners, what does it say to such as still live in sin, and serve the world and their lusts? Surely, it says to them, "Awake, ye that sleep, and arise from the dead." How long will ye continue to resist the Grace of God, to abuse his long-suffering and tender mercy, and not

consider that his goodness leadeth you to repentance? Be ashamed and confounded. When your heavenly Father is so willing graciously to receive you, freely to forgive all that is past, will you be backward at returning to Him? Shall He call in vain, "Turn, ye Backsliding Children?" Think of the ingratitude of such a conduct. Think of the aggravated guilt of it. "Seek the Lord while yet He may be found," lest He swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest.

SERMON XIII.

THE DANGER OF PARTAKING OF OTHER MEN'S SINS POINTED OUT AND APPLIED.

1 TIMOTHY, v. 22.

Neither be partaker of other Men's Sins. Keep thyself pure.

ST. PAUL had been giving Timothy several directions respecting the discharge of his ministerial duties. Among other things, he warns him not to be negligent or hasty in that important part of his office, the appointment and ordination of ministers. "Lay hands suddenly on no man." Admit no one to that sacred function without due and deliberate enquiry into his fitness and qualifications for it. To which the Apostle adds in the text, "Neither be partaker of other men's sins. Keep thyself pure;" thereby intimating, that if through Timothy's carelessness and inattention improper persons should be admitted into the ministry, he would in some degree be answerable for the

evil consequences which might ensue. The mischiefs which these men might occasion in the Church, and the disgrace which they might bring on it, would be partly owing to him, who would thus "be partaker of their sins." Wherefore, continues the Apostle, "Keep thyself pure." Guard against these things: and let thy conscience be free from this charge.

Such were the particular circumstances, under which St. Paul delivered the admonition in the text. But it is not to be confined to these circumstances. It is a general admonition, useful to all people, and under all circumstances. There is no person at any time, to whom it may not seasonably and profitably be said, "Be not partaker of other men's sins. Keep thyself pure." For in the first place, by partaking of other men's sins, we clearly add to our own sin. We may not lessen their guilt, but we certainly make our own greater. While they, by committing sin, hurt and endanger their souls, we, by partaking their sin, hurt and endanger ours also. In the second place, there is a much greater probability of our doing this, than perhaps we may suspect. There are many more ways in which we may partake of other men's sins than at first sight may appear. Hence the propriety and

seasonableness of the admonition arise: and hence, therefore, with the view of explaining and enforcing the admonition, as well as of drawing from it some profitable reflections, I shall point out several of those ways, in which we may subject ourselves to the charge implied in the text, of increasing our own guilt by partaking of other men's sins.

I. We are liable to this charge, whenever we actively and directly encourage others to the commission of Sin; whenever, by entreaties or commands, by promises or threats, by persuasion or persecution, we urge them to do any thing which the law of God forbids them to do. To act this part is clearly to do the Devil's work, who was a Tempter; and is therefore said to have been "a Murderer from the beginning:" for thus to tempt others to sin, is to do what we can to ruin and destroy them; oftentimes to bring their bodies to an untimely end in this world, but certainly to bring their souls to everlasting misery in the world to come. And yet how frequently do men act this part! How many are there who make it their business, their pleasure, yea, even their pride, to tempt others to Drunkenness, to Impurity, to Dishonesty, to Profaneness, and the like: who spare no pains to gain their end, and are even so lost to shame as to

glory in their success! And what numbers of the Young and the Unwary are thus induced to enter on the paths of sin; till at length, being hardened and confirmed in wickedness, they become themselves the Tempters and Destroyers of others! If a sinner of this description could but see at one view the vast variety of evil and misery, which he is helping to produce in individuals, in families, in children yet unborn, nay, perhaps in successive generations yet to come, he would surely feel that as the guilt of the sinner, who thus destroys much good, must be most aggravated, so his own doom must be most tremendous. But there is a day coming when things will be thus seen and felt. In that day, when all the hidden things of darkness shall be revealed, when a man's whole conduct shall be brought to light, and all the evil, with all its mischievous effects and consequences, of which he has been the Author and Promoter, shall be distinctly set forth, in its true colours; then shall the wilful and impenitent seducer of others be fully exposed before men and angels, and be covered with everlasting and horrible confusion.

II. We are liable to this charge in the text, whenever we purposely oppose a person's progress in Religion, and try to pre-

vent him from becoming a real Christian. This way of partaking in other men's sins is as commonly practised as the one just mentioned, and differs from it very little, if at all, in guilt. Men indeed do not usually look upon the matter thus. There are many who, while they think it wrong to tempt others to dishonesty or intemperance, yet do not hesitate to laugh them out of their religious profession, and to persuade them to undervalue and reject the Gospel. But where is the real difference between these things? If you are endeavouring to lead a fellow-creature into endless misery, what difference does it make, whether you conduct him thither by one path or by another? If through your means he is turned aside from the way of *godliness*, into which he was about to enter; if through your insinuations, arguments, or arts, he is diverted from his holy purpose; if, instead of believing with the heart unto righteousness, he is through your means induced to resist his conscience, to stifle his convictions, to neglect the Saviour, to quench the Spirit, to take up with merely the form of godliness, and so at last to perish in unbelief, in what respects is the injury which you do to him, or the guilt which you bring upon yourself, less aggravated, than if you had led him

along the beaten road of destruction by a more openly profane and immoral way? Irreligion and a neglect of the Saviour, will as certainly ruin his soul, as immorality and vice. And in the sight of God, you are as much the murderer of his soul, by having tempted him to unbelief, as if you had tempted him to dishonesty, or intemperance. When you shall meet that person in another world, and shall see him plunged, together with yourself, into that fire which never shall be quenched, *how* will you feel? *what* will be your thoughts? 'Alas! (you will 'be ready to say,) but for me, he perhaps 'had never come to this place of torment! 'There was once a time when he had some 'serious thoughts about religion, and was 'disposed to enter in at the strait gate. 'But I withstood him. I would not enter 'in myself, neither would I suffer him, 'who was going to enter in. I did all I 'could to prevent him. I sneered at his 'conscientious scruples. I laughed at his 'religious fears. I tried to make him be-'lieve, what, in my heart, I did not myself 'believe, that all those who profess more 'love and submission than others to the 'Saviour, were only hypocrites and de-'ceivers. I represented to him, that there 'was no occasion to be righteous over-

'much; that if he strictly observed the 'precepts of the Bible, he would surely 'lose the favour of the world, and would 'bring on himself shame, poverty, and per- 'secution.' I threatened to do him all the 'harm in my power, if he did not forsake 'the company of Christ's People, whom, 'with the view of discouraging him the 'more, I reviled and ridiculed, and loaded 'with opprobrious names. And now behold 'the fruit of my wicked attempts! I suc- 'ceeded in drawing off his soul from God. 'I made him ungodly like myself. And 'where is he now? In this place of tor- 'ment with me. How does the very sight 'of him aggravate my sufferings! How 'will his curses and reproaches sting my 'soul through all eternity!' — Surely the very thought of the possibility of such a scene hereafter, strongly enforces the admonition in the text, "Be not partaker of other men's sins. Keep thyself pure."

III. Another way in which we may be chargeable with other men's sins, is by furnishing them with means and opportunities of sinning. Men are often prevented from doing evil by not having the power of doing it. They would readily commit sin, if a fit occasion and suitable inducements offered themselves. It must be clear, then, that to

furnish them with this occasion and with these inducements, is so far to encourage them in the commission of sin; and consequently to partake of their guilt. It is a common but just remark, founded on this principle, that the receiver of stolen goods is as guilty as the thief: for if there were no receivers of such articles, persons who might be inclined to dishonesty would have far less temptation to practise it. And the same reasoning applies to other cases, even where there is no *intention* of encouraging another to sin. Suppose, for instance, that in the number of our acquaintance there happens to be a person, who is prone to the sin of evil speaking: who is a tale-bearer, a revealer of secrets, a busy-body, prying into other men's matters; an inventor of false reports, or a propagator of malicious stories: how do we conduct ourselves towards such a person? Have we an ear open to his tales? Do we listen with readiness to his slanderous and mischievous discourse, to his false misrepresentations and malevolent reports? If we act thus, we are clearly partakers of his sin. We are, however unintentionally, encouraging him to the commission of it. It is by being listened to, that persons of this character are emboldened to proceed. If no one would attend to

what they say, their end would be disappointed, their malice defeated, and their tongues silenced. They would bring fewer evil things out of the evil treasure of their heart, from the want of opportunity and encouragement. If we provide them with this opportunity, if we give to them this encouragement, we have a share in their evil things. And while their guilt is not the less, ours is manifestly the greater, for having afforded them an occasion of increasing theirs.

IV. We become partakers of other men's sins, when we excite them to sin by our Example. Example has great weight. Though we should have no design of drawing others into sin, yet if we ourselves sin, we shall certainly prove a snare and temptation to them. It is well known how prone men are to imitation: how ready to justify themselves in what is wrong, by saying, that 'they are 'no worse than their neighbours;' that 'they 'only do as others do;' that if '*they* are to 'be blamed, what is to be said of numbers, 'who are not only as bad, but even worse than 'they are?' So that if we ourselves do wrong, it is next to impossible, however little we may suspect or intend it, but that we shall encourage others also in doing it. Some will be led by our example to *enter* on evil

courses: others will be induced to *persist* in them. Our conduct will be pleaded by many as a sufficient answer to the reproofs of conscience, and the admonitions of friends. And thus numbers may be misled, and numbers hardened. Our Example indeed will have more or less weight according to circumstances. It will partly depend upon our rank, our property, our influence, our employment, our religious profession. At the same time, there is no person, be his situation what it may, but whose example, if a bad one, will prove hurtful to some. His relations, and friends, and those immediately connected with him, will probably be injured by it. To such especially as are in the same situation of life with himself, his bad conduct will be a snare and a temptation. Does he take unfair advantages in his dealings? They will think themselves justified in doing the same. Do they see him neglecting duties which he ought to be fulfilling? They will conclude that they also may neglect their proper duties. And thus, in a variety of instances, he will be countenancing them, however unintentionally, in the commission of Sin.

V. I shall mention only one other way, by which we may become "partakers of other men's sins," and that is, by omitting

to exercise our authority over them, and so to prevent them from the commission of sin. Let us remember that they are not Kings and Magistrates only, to whom authority over others is entrusted. There are many other stations and relations in life, which confer on men this authority. Parents have authority over their children. Masters have authority over their servants. And why has God committed to them this authority, but that they should exercise it for good purposes, in his service and to his glory? He expects and requires that they should use this power entrusted to them, for the prevention and suppression of sin. It is not indeed in the power of a parent, or of a master, to change the heart of his children or his servants: (this is the work of God only:) but it is in his power, so long as they are under his eye and his roof, not to allow of an immoral practice among them; not to connive at any secret wickedness; to reprove and rebuke them if occasion require; to restrain them from swearing, from sabbath-breaking, from drunkenness, and the like. It is in the power, and it is the duty of parents and masters, thus to use their authority: and if they fail to use it thus; if they suffer their children or their servants to sin, without endeavouring to restrain them,

they are doubtless responsible for their neglect, and so far partakers of the guilt. Recall to mind the reason which the Lord assigned for his displeasure against Eli: "Because his sons made themselves vile, and he *restrained them not.*" *

Having thus pointed out several of the ways in which either directly or indirectly we may become partakers of other men's sins, I shall now draw some few reflections from what has been said.

In the first place, seeing that there are so many ways, in which we may contribute to increase the guilt of other people, what need have we of continual care and watchfulness, that in this respect we may keep ourselves pure! How constantly ought we to be on our guard, lest we should lay a stumbling-block in the way of others, and so cause them to fall! Not to mention the addition which we make to our own guilt by thus partaking of their sins, how can we be truly said to love our Brethren, yea, to love them as ourselves, if we are regardless of their spiritual good, and even through inadvertence prove an occasion to them to sin! Call to mind the reasoning of St. Paul on this subject. He says, that "when we sin so against the Brethren, and wound their

* 1 Sam. iii. 13.

weak conscience, we sin against Christ," nay, we cause those "to perish for whom Christ died." Call to mind, also, the holy, self-denying resolution of the Apostle, in reference to the same subject. "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."*

In the second place, we may observe how absurd, as well as how false is the assertion, which we so frequently hear from the mouths of men, that they *have never injured any one;* that they *have never done any harm to their neighbours!* For how can this possibly be true? Can it be true of any of us, that we have never been a partaker of other men's sins? Have we never wilfully and knowingly tempted any one to the commission of sin? Have we never purposely endeavoured to dissuade or prevent any one from becoming religious? Have we never, even through inadvertency and carelessness, furnished any one with an occasion, an opportunity of sinning? Have we never, in any instance, by our example encouraged another to act contrary to the law and will of God? Have we never, by failing to exert our proper and lawful authority, countenanced another in the practice of

* 1 Cor. viii. 11, 12, 13.

evil? Let us look back into our whole lives. Let us consult our consciences, and see what answer we can make to these enquiries. Let us see whether in this view of the subject we can *truly* say, that we 'have never 'injured any one.' Surely we must feel, that we cannot say thus, unless we should suppose, that to lead others either directly or indirectly into sin, is not to do them an injury. Be assured, that such a supposition, should it be entertained, is most mistaken, and shows a very darkened mind. To hurt your neighbour in his character, in his property, or in his person, is a trifling injury compared with that of bringing guilt upon his soul. And those who have a tender concern for their own souls, will no less tenderly feel for the souls of others also.

In the third place, let the subject before us be applied to convince us of our sins. Let us acquire from it a more just and enlarged notion of the extent and measure of our guilt, and of our consequent need of a Saviour. Let us call distinctly and forcibly to mind, how greatly we have been partakers of other men's sins. Let us remember in how many ways we have helped to increase the guilt of others. And let us next consider, how little it is in our power to undo the evil, which we may thus have

done. Let us go and find out those of whose sins we may have been at any time partakers; and let us try to make them sensible of their guilt, and to bring them to repentance on account of it. Alas! where shall we find them? Many who have been thus injured by us are probably unknown to us. Many are at a distance from us, and will perhaps never be seen by us any more. Some, it may be, are already gone into another world, with all their sins upon their heads, and can never be profited by our admonitions, or our prayers. And others, though still in the land of the living, and within our reach, are yet possibly too hardened in the ways of sin (and, let us remember, hardened partly by our means) to listen to our counsel, or to be reclaimed by our endeavours. Let us go then and repair the mischief we have done. We cannot repair it if we would. Let us go then, and in secret before God, confess and deplore our guilt. Let us confess and deplore, before Him who seeth the heart, the share which we have had in wounding the consciences, in hardening the hearts, in ruining the souls of others. Let us call to mind how much more injury *might* have been done by us in this way, than perhaps *has been actually* done. Add all this measure of

sin to our own personal transgressions, and see to how great a size the whole amount will swell. Let the thought of those things humble us to the dust. Have we not reason, every one of us, from the heart to say, "Enter not into judgement with thy servant, O Lord!" but "cleanse thou me from my secret faults?" Let us judge ourselves, brethren, and we shall not be judged of the Lord. Let us condemn ourselves, and He will not condemn us. Let us see our need of Jesus Christ and of his all-sufficient grace and mercy. Let us flee to Him in this our day of grace, that so we may be saved by Him in the great and terrible day of the Lord.

SERMON XIV.

MERCY IN THAT DAY.

2 TIMOTHY, i. 18.

The Lord grant unto him, that he may find Mercy of the Lord in that Day.

WHEN St. Paul wrote this Epistle, he was for the second time a prisoner at Rome for Christ's sake. His confinement indeed was not in itself severe; but his afflictions were greatly increased by the unkindness and ingratitude of many persons, from whom he might have expected a very different treatment. "This thou knowest," he says to Timothy, "that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me: of whom are Phygellus, and Hermogenes." The mention, however, of this circumstance led him to notice one person, whose conduct had been directly the reverse. Onesiphorus, whose kind offices to the Apostle at Ephesus Timothy could not but remember, had

shown the same kindness to him at Rome; "For," pursues St. Paul, "he has oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain. But sought me out diligently, and found me." This conduct had made a deep impression on the Apostle's mind; and the recollection of it led him to break forth into the devout and solemn petition recorded in the text: — "The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day!" From these words two important truths, which are deserving our most serious consideration, may be inferred:

I. That there is a Day coming, in which to find mercy of the Lord, will be our only consolation and security.

II. That there will be some, who in that Day will not find mercy of the Lord.

I. The day here meant is the Day so frequently mentioned in Scripture; and in which we are all most deeply concerned. It is described by many different names, as "the Day of Judgement," "the Day of the Lord," "the last Day," "the Day of Wrath," "the Day in which God will judge the world." In fact, it is that great and terrible Day, when we shall all stand before the judgement-seat of Christ, to receive the aweful sentence, which will for ever assign us to the habitation of unspeakable happi-

ness or misery. It is that Day in "which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." It is that Day, "in which the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel; and to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe:"—that Day in which he will "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Arch-Angel, and the trump of God," and "will sit on the throne of his glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations:"—that Day in the which "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of Life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of Damnation."—A Day thus awefully distinguished; a Day on which events thus infinitely momentous are dependent; a Day, which will be to every one of us the end of time, and the beginning of eternity, may with reason be justly called *that* Day; for it is a Day which ought to be deeply fixed on our minds, and ever uppermost in our thoughts. Such is the Day here meant: a Day, which is fast approaching; which

every hour brings nearer; and of which no wit, nor wisdom, nor power of ours can prevent or delay the coming. In that Day, then, what will be our only consolation and security? The text reminds us, "To find mercy of the Lord." In this mercy alone will be all our comfort, all our safety. If in that Day we find not mercy of the Lord, we are lost, and miserable for ever. This is a truth, indeed, which is generally admitted. Most men will readily confess, that they stand in need of mercy; but few, it is to be feared, understand what this confession implies. Do *we* understand it? There can be no doubt but that we all entertain a hope of finding mercy of the Lord in that Day: and the Lord grant that we all may find it! But while we entertain this hope, do we rightly understand what it means? Are we sensible what mercy is; what hoping for it presupposes; what, by professing that we hope for it, we confess ourselves to be?—Let us further consider these points.

Mercy is another word for grace. It is an act of free and unmerited favour. It is showing kindness to one who has no claim to it, and is totally undeserving of it. This idea of mercy should be clearly conceived, and constantly kept in view. Men sometimes say, that such a person *deserves* to

have mercy shown to him! But this is a very incorrect and careless way of speaking. A man can never *deserve* mercy. There may be some circumstances in his case, which may make him more particularly an object of compassion, or may induce us especially to show mercy to him in preference to some others: but neither these, nor any other circumstances in his case, can give him any *claim* to mercy. The very supposition of such a claim would totally contradict every idea of mercy. When a criminal by his offence has forfeited his life, and is condemned to die; the King, from pity to the offender, or from some other considerations best known to himself, may grant a pardon and remit the sentence. Here is mercy, an act of free, unmerited grace to the undeserving, and the guilty. But to say that there could be any thing in the criminal which gave him a *claim* to mercy, would be to talk absurdly. If indeed he has been unjustly condemned, then he may reasonably claim to have his sentence remitted, and we may truly say that he *deserves* a pardon. But in this case the reversing of the sentence, the grant to him of pardon, is an act not of mercy, but of justice. The King in restoring him to life and liberty does not

even display his clemency: he merely frees an injured man from a sentence, which never ought to have been passed upon him. The very idea, then, of *mercy* naturally shuts out all idea of *merit*. These two things are totally contrary to each other, and can never exist together. Observe what St. Paul says on this subject. He tells us plainly that Mercy and Merit, or in other words, Grace and Works, imply a direct contradiction in terms. "If (says he) it is by Grace, then it is no more of Works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of Works, then it is no more of Grace: otherwise work is no more work." * A thing cannot at the same time be both a Gift and a Debt. If it be a gift, it is not a debt; if it be a debt, it is not a gift. If a man by his merit have a right to a favour from us, in bestowing it on him we only render to him his due. If he be without merit, and undeserving of our favour, then to bestow it on him, is on our part an act of Mercy: it is to give him what he has no right to expect, what we are under no obligation to give, and may justly keep from him.—It seemed desirable to dwell the longer on this point, because it is one of so much consequence. It is only by having

* Rom. xi. 6.

a clear view of it, that we can understand what is really meant by Mercy, and what the Hope of it, in fact, implies. From what has been said we may now perceive, that when we confess our hopes of finding Mercy of the Lord in that Day, we in truth confess that we are poor, and miserable offenders, unworthy of his notice, without any claim to his favour, deserving only his indignation, and justly exposed to the sentence of his righteous Law. We confess that we renounce every plea of merit; that in ourselves we have no goodness, no pretension to reward; that our only hopes of being saved from the wrath to come are placed on the rich and sovereign grace of God; that we are willing to receive the forgiveness of our sins as a free unmerited gift bestowed on us, not because we are worthy of it, or can make any suitable return for it; but because we are lost, and miserable, and must perish without it. In short, we confess that we ask for favour of the Lord, as the beggar asks for alms, as the criminal asks for pardon; that in ourselves we have no right to it, and that if the Lord bestow it on us, it is solely because he is rich in Goodness and delighteth in Mercy. Now is this really the confession which we intend to make, when we

say that we hope to find mercy of the Lord in the Day of Judgement? It is to be feared, as was before observed, that many who profess to have this hope, mean not to make any confession of this kind. It is to be feared that but few of them have in truth such humbling thoughts of themselves, and such entire dependence on the Lord's free grace and goodness. It is to be feared that many, when they talk of hoping to find mercy, mean in fact to say that they hope to find *justice* in that Day; and that their hopes of being favourably received then are built not on God's free mercy, but on their own merits, and on their secret claims to reward. We may judge this to be the case from the language which is often heard from persons, and the dispositions which are frequently seen in them while yet they profess to trust only in the Divine Mercy. When asked to give a reason of the Hope that is in them, what reason do they give? They say they hope to find mercy with God, 'because their sins have been so few, 'or their good actions so many; because 'they owe no ill will to any one, or are so 'much better than many of their neigh-'bours; because they have been kind, or 'just, or charitable; because they have 'read their Bible, have said their prayers,

'and have frequented the house of God.'— This is their language. But, my brethren, what does such language prove? It proves that those who use it are trusting not to the mercy of God, but to their own merits. Their ground of hope is something in themselves. They think that they have in them some good thing which will recommend them to their Judge, and claim his favour. But such recommendations, such claims, will yield no consolation, no security in that Day. All such self-righteous pleas must fail. The vanity of them will then be fully seen. Whatever excuses for their sins, whatever boastings of their goodness, men may now make, in that Day "every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." Mercy then will be the only plea. Then every heart will cry, "Enter not into Judgement with us, O Lord: but have mercy upon us, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies." — And blessed will those be who then find mercy; for they only shall be saved, and shall enter into the Joy of their Lord.

Let us now proceed to the other Truth suggested by the text: —

II. That there will be some who in that Day will not find mercy of the Lord.

St. Paul, when he prays that Onesiphorus

may find mercy in that day, clearly intimates it to be possible that he may not find it. And if it were not certain that Onesiphorus would find it, it is not certain that others will find it. Indeed the Scriptures plainly tell us that all will not find it. We are expressly told that in that Day some will say, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" to whom he will say, "Verily I know you not;" and that others "will call, but he will not answer;" that they "shall seek him early, but shall not find him."—This is a very aweful Truth, and ought to excite in us the most serious concern. If some will not find mercy of the Lord in that Day, how do we know that we shall find it? Who are those that shall not find it? Why may we not be among that unhappy number? To enable us to answer these important questions, let us see what the Scriptures teach us concerning those who *will* find mercy of the Lord in that Day.

In the first place, they are now seeking mercy, and seeking it in that one way, in which alone God has promised to bestow it.

It is a general direction in Scripture, that they who would find must seek. And it is a general promise, that "Every one that seeketh findeth." So in this particular instance, he that would find mercy of the

Lord in that Day, must now seek it: and every one that now seeks it shall in that Day find it. To seek it implies a sense of our own need of it, and an earnest desire to obtain it: it also implies that we use our endeavours to obtain it; that we put our whole trust in God's Mercy; pray to him for it, and make it our daily ground of Hope; saying with Holy David, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, after thy great goodness;" and with the penitent Publican, "God be merciful to me a Sinner."

It is not, however, enough now to *seek* mercy of the Lord: we must also seek it in *that one appointed way*, in which alone He hath promised to bestow it. Persons have naturally strange notions about the mercy of God. They think that they have nothing to do but to call on Him for mercy, and that they shall surely obtain it. But they forget that God is a holy and a just, as well as a merciful God. They forget that while he describes himself to be gracious and merciful, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin, He also says, that "He will by no means clear the guilty."* They forget that He is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" and that He is the righteous Judge of all the earth, who is bound by

* Exodus, xxxiv. 7.

all His glorious perfections, to hate and to punish sin. They overlook all this part of his character, and think that He has nothing else to do, than to show mercy to man, and to pity and pardon all offenders. This indeed is his most favourite work. Mercy is the attribute which He most delights to exercise. Punishment is called his *strange* * work. But then it is only in perfect agreement with his infinite Justice and Holiness that He delights to exercise His Mercy. Nay, it is only in agreement with these, that He *will*, or *can* exercise it. He cannot deny Himself. He cannot *so* exercise his mercy as to give any the slightest grounds for suspecting that He is less than infinitely Just, and Holy. It rests then with Himself alone to tell us, in what way he can *thus* show his mercy towards us: and He *has* told us. He has told us that it is through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ being God manifest in the flesh, by his infinite sacrifice on the Cross, has satisfied the Divine Justice and Holiness. The Almighty, by demanding and providing such a sacrifice, has shown in the clearest manner His hatred of sin, and His full determination to punish it. With this sacrifice, then, He is well pleased; be-

* Isaiah, xxviii. 21.

cause while it magnifies His glorious perfections, it leaves him at full liberty to show mercy in the most unlimited degree to sinners, even the chief of sinners. All, then, who hope to share this mercy, must seek it in this way, in which alone it is offered to them. They must seek it through Jesus Christ. They must pray for it in His name: they must plead His merits and sacrifice as the only ground of their obtaining it. If they do not seek mercy in this way, they will never find it. They may desire mercy, and earnestly pray for it; but unless they do these things in the faith of Jesus Christ, there is not, there will not, there cannot be any mercy for them. All, then, who will find mercy in that Day, *thus* seek it now. They seek it through Jesus Christ. They know that they can obtain it in no other way. They desire to obtain it in no other way. And because they seek it in this way, they shall surely find it. — But there is another thing to be taken into the account. The Scriptures teach us, that those who will find mercy in that Day, not only now seek it, and seek it in the right way, but also,

In the second place, that they are duly affected, and properly influenced by the views and hopes which they have of the rich mercy of God in Christ. There is a sad

propensity in man to abuse the Divine Mercy, and to take occasion, from this most glorious perfection of the Almighty, to run the farther, and continue the longer, in sin. How many persons dare to do wickedly, and even to encourage themselves in doing so, on the very presumption, that God is merciful! When reproved by their own conscience, when warned by their minister, when admonished by their friends, they silence these friendly monitors by saying to their hearts, 'I shall do well 'at last. God hath spared me hitherto; and 'I doubt not but he will continue to spare 'me. He is gracious and merciful, and 'will at least bear with me for some time 'to come. I need not be in so much haste 'to repent. I will enjoy myself a little 'longer; and will take a little more plea-'sure. Whenever I turn to God, he will 'receive me, and I have no fear, but I 'shall find mercy in that day.' — Let us beware how we deceive ourselves by such presumptuous reasoning. Let us beware how we thus turn the Grace of God into licentiousness, and increase our guilt, through that very perfection of the Almighty which ought to have a directly contrary effect. Those who thus perversely and presumptuously abuse his mercy, will *not* find

mercy of Him in that day. Their conduct shows a hardness, and an impenitence of Heart, which, if retained, must for ever exclude them from mercy. How differently did a sense of God's mercy work on the pious David! Hear what he says, "O Lord, there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." He felt that the goodness of God led him to Repentance. The rich mercy of the Lord, far from hardening his Heart, softened and overcame it. How could he sin against so much mercy? How could he offend, and displease One, who was so good and gracious? Should he presume on His goodness? Should he sin on that Grace might abound? God forbid! Perish the ungenerous, the ungrateful thought! ' "There is forgiveness ' with Thee that thou mayest be feared." ' Thy abundant mercy so freely given, ' so wonderfully shown, fills my heart with ' such holy awe, with such constraining ' love of thy glorious Name, that I could ' never forgive myself, should I wilfully ' sin against so much goodness.' — Such are the feelings, such is the secret language of all those, who have now right views of the Divine Mercy, and are duly influenced by them. While they anxiously desire Mercy, and depend on Mercy only, they cautiously

avoid all sin. While they pray that they may find mercy in that Day, they also pray for grace to resist temptation, to overcome the world, to deny the flesh, to abound in every good word and work. They also learn and strive to imitate that glorious perfection which they adore, and in which they trust. Hoping themselves to find mercy of the Lord, they now show mercy to others. They are kind, forgiving, charitable. They display in their lives and tempers the blessed fruits of the Spirit, love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness.

Such, then, are the Persons who shall find mercy of the Lord in that Day. If we hope to find it, let us see that we are Persons of this Character. Let us see that we trust in Jesus Christ alone for mercy: since "whosoever trusteth in Him shall not be confounded." Let us see that while through Him we hope for mercy, we flee from sin: since "the Goodness of God should lead us to repentance." Let us see that we show mercy to others: since "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

SERMON XV.

THE HOLY SPIRIT THE COMFORTER.

JOHN, xiv. 16.

And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth.

As the coming of the Messiah was the great promise of the Old Testament, so the Gift of the Spirit is the great promise of the New. Hence the Gospel is called "the ministration of the Spirit:" and the first gift which Christ on his ascension into Heaven bestowed on his Church, was the Gift of the Holy Ghost. There are many ways in which this Gift may be profitably contemplated. I shall select for our consideration that view of the Holy Spirit which is set before us in the text. He is there represented under the title and character of the *Comforter*. "I will pray the Father, and

He shall give you another Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth." In three other places in this same discourse, our Lord speaks of the Spirit by the same Title. He thrice calls him "*The Comforter*." Hence we might justly infer, that one part of the Spirit's office in our Redemption is to comfort them that mourn. And with this inference the whole tenor of Scripture agrees. Whatever peace, consolation, or joy we receive, is expressly described to be the work and fruit of the Spirit. Do we abound in hope? It is "through the power of the Holy Spirit." Are we filled with joy? It is "with the Holy Ghost." Is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts? It is "by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Indeed the importance of the Spirit as a Comforter may be strongly proved from the language of our Lord to his Apostles in another part of this discourse. He endeavours to reconcile them to the thoughts of his leaving them, by the assurance that it was for *their good* that he left them. "It is *expedient for you* that I go away." And why *expedient?* Because, he adds, "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."* The Benefits which they would derive from the pre-

* John, xvi. 7.

sence of the Comforter with them, would be so great, as not only to compensate for the loss of Christ's personal presence, but even to surpass the benefits which they would receive from his continuance with them. Hitherto Christ himself had been their Comforter; but He would provide them with another Comforter, who should do even more than supply his place.

It shall be the object of this discourse, to set before you a plain and connected statement of the *way* in which the Holy Spirit discharges this part of his great office, and becomes our Comforter.

To this end I would first remind you of the nature of that Comfort which he gives: what it is, and in what it consists.

The Comfort which He gives partakes of the nature of Him who gives it. The Gift resembles the Giver. He is a *Divine* person and the Comfort which he gives is Divine. It is such as God only can give: a comfort which the world can neither give nor take away. The Comforter also is *a Spirit*, and thus also the Comfort which He gives is spiritual. It is seated in the heart. It is shed abroad in the soul. It is inward and invisible. He is further the *Spirit of Truth*. Thus the Comfort which he gives is strictly agreeable to the word of God, which is Truth

itself. Again, He is *the Spirit of Holiness.* So the Comfort which He gives is holy in its nature and tendency: it is found only in company with holiness, and operates in making and keeping holy those who partake of it. In other words, the Comfort which the Holy Spirit gives, is a real, substantial, heartfelt Comfort. It is such a Comfort as nothing else can give: an inward Comfort, which nothing outward can destroy or disturb. "For when he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" It is such a Comfort as is felt by a mind at peace with God and with itself. It is such a lively satisfying Comfort, as that man possesses, who can truly use these words, and from the heart can say, 'God is my friend and 'father. He is reconciled to me, and at 'peace with me. He will provide for me, 'and protect me. All my concerns are in 'His hands. I leave myself to Him, to do 'what He pleases with me, assured that He 'will do what is best for me. I am thankful for the favours which He bestows on 'me. I am contented with the portion 'which He allows me. Whether He give 'or take away, I am resigned to his will; 'for I know that He careth for me, and 'will make all things work together for my 'good, for my final, everlasting good:

'the good of my soul, my salvation through 'eternity.' It need hardly be asked, whether the man, who can *truly* use this language, is not a happy man? Whether these are not feelings full of comfort: whether this is not a state of mind, in which true peace and blessedness are, if any where, to be found. Such, however, is the state of mind which the Spirit, in discharging the important office of Comforter, produces and maintains.

Now, in bringing men to this state, the first step is to take away those false grounds of comfort, on which they naturally rest. These grounds will be different in different persons. Some place their confidence and seek their comfort in the world and worldly things. Their hearts and their treasure are here on earth. If their affairs prosper, and their corn, and wine, and oil increase; or if they can enjoy themselves; and having much goods laid up for many years, can take their ease, eat, drink, and be merry: or if they can be admired and applauded by their fellow-creatures; or can gratify their ambitious desires, and obtain a little power over others; then they are satisfied and happy. They have no higher ideas of comfort, than what these things can yield. They desire no other peace or joy than what is

to be found in the pursuit or the possession of them. Others there are, who, not being so entirely devoted to this world, and having some thoughts and desires about the world to come, have other grounds of comfort. They rest in the thoughts of their own righteousness. Their comfort is that they are moral, or honest, or sober, and better than others: or that they come to church, and know the Scriptures, and attend to religious duties: or that they are kind, and useful, and charitable, and by their good works commend themselves to God, and shall surely be repaid for all they do here, by heaven hereafter. These are the thoughts to which they fly for refuge; and in which they find their comfort and delight. But all these grounds of comfort are alike false and vain; and, before true peace can be obtained and felt, must be removed. Here, then, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, begins his gracious work. He takes away these grounds of comfort. And how does He take them away? By secretly convincing the soul of sin. The real cause why a man finds comfort in these things is, that he is ignorant of his own true state and character. He knows not his guilt and condemnation as a sinner. His conscience is asleep. He feels not his sins. He sees not his danger.

But let his conscience be once awakened; let his eyes be opened; and the case will be greatly altered. None of those things, on which he has hitherto rested with complacency, will any longer yield him the comfort which they used to do. Seeing himself, as in the sight of God, defiled and stained with sin, he is no longer satisfied with his own goodness. Instead of having a righteousness of his own, in which he may stand clothed and accepted before God, he now discovers himself to be naked, and exposed to the Divine wrath. What, then, is become of his comfort? The foundation on which he placed it is taken away, and with it, the comfort also is gone. Having no more confidence in the flesh, he is uneasy and dissatisfied, and anxiously looks around for something else, on which he may ground his hopes and place his comfort. And what will the world and worldly things now do for him? Will they yield him satisfaction? Will they heal the wounded spirit? Alas! miserable comforters they are found to be. Their vanity is seen: their insufficiency is felt. The pleasures, the profits, the honours of the world, cannot silence the voice of conscience; cannot satisfy the demands of the law; cannot appease the wrath of God. And what comfort, then, can they now yield

to the soul, which at length perceives its own true state, and dreads the judgement to which it stands exposed? It must now have some other ground of peace and hope, than what this vain unsatisfying world can furnish. Thus is the false peace broken. Thus does the Holy Spirit begin his gracious operation. Like a skilful physician, he has not healed the wound slightly; but he has probed it and laid it open to the quick. He has indeed given pain; for thus to convince a man of his sins, and to deprive him of all his former grounds of comfort, is indeed a painful operation. But it has been done with a wise and with a merciful design; it has been done with a view of leading the soul to true peace and solid comfort. Nor has the Blessed Spirit undertaken more than He is able to accomplish. He has wounded, but He can also heal. He has broken, but He can also bind up. He has caused grief and trouble, but He can also restore comfort to the mourners. And by what means does He effect this part of his heavenly work? By revealing to the soul the only real foundation of peace and comfort, and by enabling it to fix and to build upon it; "and this foundation is Jesus Christ. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid." Our Saviour, speaking of the Spirit

to his Apostles, says, that "He shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you:" "He shall testify of me:" and it is by thus testifying of Him, by taking of the things of Christ, and showing them to men, that He carries on his office of "the Comforter." Having convinced the soul of sin, having thus taught it to feel its guilt and danger, He now leads it to see its cure and remedy. He sets before it Christ crucified as the only but all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. He bids it look with a believing hope to this Almighty Saviour, for the removal of its guilt and the recovery of its peace. He points Him out "as the propitiation through faith in his blood, whom God has set forth for the remission of sins;" and in whom alone the sinner can find pardon, peace, and hope. Under this heavenly teaching, new light breaks in upon the soul. It had heard before of Jesus Christ: perhaps it had professed belief in his name, and had even rendered to him a formal service; but now it has far other and clearer views of Him. It discovers in him a suitableness, which it never saw before. It sees that the salvation which the Gospel offers, is a salvation exactly fitted to its wants. With the Apostle it now learns to "count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord;" and even

to be willing "to suffer the loss of all things, that it may win Christ and be found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the Righteousness which is of God by faith."* So great is the change, which has been wrought in the soul, since the time that it trusted in its own righteousness, and supremely valued the things of this world.

But the work is not yet complete. False grounds of comfort have been removed. The only true foundation has been discovered. An anxious desire of being built on it has been excited. But one further step yet remains; namely, actually to build on it, and to experience the comfort which belongs to it. Nor does the Comforter leave this work unfinished. He enables the soul to lay hold of, and to appropriate to itself, the blessed hope set before it. He enables the soul to believe on Christ, and to rely on Him for the fulfilling of his promises to itself. In the course of this process, there may, by turns, be many doubts and fears. Light and darkness may alternately succeed. But hope in the end prevails; faith gains ground; and peace is thus gradually restored to the soul: a peace totally unlike that which had been lost:

* Philip. iii. 8, 9.

a peace which passeth all understanding; the legacy, which Christ has left to his Church; and, as we have seen, the work and fruit of the Holy Spirit the Comforter.

The use which I would make of this subject, is one which the subject itself naturally suggests. I would use it for *our* comfort. Possibly some of you may be at this time under the leading and teaching of the Spirit of Truth, and yet may be ignorant that you are so. He may have convinced you of sin. By his secret work in your soul, He may have gradually brought you to think of yourselves in a very different way from what you used to think. An impression, of which, perhaps, you can give no clear and accurate account, has, by degrees, been made upon your heart; and the effect has been that you find and feel yourself to be a sinner; and such a sinner as you did not once suspect yourself to be. Many parts of your conduct, of which you formerly took little or no account; nay, on which perhaps you once looked with satisfaction and complacency, you now perceive to have been sinful. You find much more to be required of you, than you formerly supposed. And thus, while the demands against you seem daily to be increasing, the wrath of God, and the terrors of a

Judgement to come, appear to you far more serious things than was wont to be the case. The consequence of all this inward experience is, that you are uneasy and distressed. You have lost your peace of mind. Your comfort is gone. Those things, which used to give you peace and comfort, no longer give you any. Perhaps you even perceive, that the very trusting in them, as you used to do, was in itself a sin. You therefore feel a dislike and an abhorrence of them: and wonder that you could ever find pleasure or comfort in them. In the meanwhile, your worldly friends, not knowing what is passing in your heart, and totally mistaking the nature of your case, may be urging you to drive away your melancholy thoughts, and to seek the recovery of your peace in those very things, in pleasure, company, and business, where you feel that you can never find it. Nay, you yourself may greatly mistake your own case. You may perhaps be supposing, that all these things are against you; that this conviction of sin, this fear of wrath and judgement, this loss of peace, this deprivation of former comforts, are but the beginnings of sorrows, the too probable proofs that God has forsaken you, and the certain intimations and earnests of the wrath to come.

May what has been said in this discourse help to undeceive you! May the Holy Spirit the Comforter make use of it, to forward his gracious work in your heart; to show you that this is indeed *His* work; and that by these means He is gradually preparing you for that real, solid comfort, with which, in due time, He will cheer and refresh your souls! Instead then of being cast down, be thankful and rejoice. Be thankful that you have been brought to see the vanity of those foundations on which you once were built. Be thankful that your false comforts are destroyed; that the world is no longer your treasure; that your own righteousness is no longer your trust. Rejoice in that there is a real treasure within your reach; a sure rock on which you may securely place your hopes. Follow the leadings of the Blessed Spirit. Listen to those cheering truths which He reveals to you in his holy Word. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "He that believeth on Him, shall not be confounded." The Lord Jesus Christ is the Pearl of great price; the true invaluable Treasure. He is the Rock of Ages; the only sure Foundation. Lay hold of this Treasure. Build on this one Foundation. Hear what the gracious, heavenly Saviour

himself declares to you, and to all like you, "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." If you are one of those whose case has been here described, *you* are heavy-laden. You are labouring under a distressing sense of sin, under an anxious desire of finding some real lasting consolation. Come then unto Him, who so tenderly calls you to Himself; who so freely offers to give you rest. He has already sent his Spirit into your heart to prepare the way for your coming to Him. May that Spirit further incline and help you to come! May he enable you with the heart to believe on Jesus Christ, and so to make your peace with God! May He subdue your corruptions, purify your affections, enable you to fight manfully and successfully against the enemies of your salvation, and shed abroad the love of GOD in your souls! Thus may He fulfil in you his gracious work of love and consolation! May He bind up the broken heart, and heal the wounded Spirit; and as your heavenly Comforter, Sanctifier, and Friend, abide with you for ever!

SERMON XVI.

CERTAINTY OF SIN FINDING US OUT.

NUMBERS, xxxii. 23.

Be sure your Sin will find you out.

THERE is nothing which proves more ruinous to the souls of men, than the hope of being able to sin without incurring punishment. It is this hope, which first tempts them to commit sin, and afterwards keeps them from repenting of it. Did they feel assured that punishment would *certainly* follow the offence, fear would prevent them from committing it. After having committed it, were they but convinced that judgement would *surely* overtake them, they would at least be anxious to avert it. But resisting every assurance and all conviction of these things, they rush into sin without fear, and live in it without apprehension. Though liable every moment to be called

into judgement, they feel no concern; or if a serious thought at times rises in their mind, they speedily dismiss it, with the presumptuous idea that "*they shall escape at last.*" The greatest kindness, then, that can be done to such persons, is to destroy their hope, to show them their mistake, and to make them feel, that continuing as they are, they most assuredly shall not escape at last. But it is the Lord alone, who can work these things. He only can "convince of sin." He only can open the heart, and fix any deep impression there. He employs, however, his word, as an instrument in his hand, for accomplishing this gracious purpose. In an humble reliance, therefore, on the teaching of his Spirit, we may proceed to the consideration of this passage, addressed by Moses to the Israelites, "Be sure your sin will find you out." The better to explain and enforce this solemn declaration, I shall show,

I. What is meant by our Sin finding us out.

II. The Certainty that it will do so.

By the expression *Our Sin*, we may, in the first place, understand any particular sin of which we may have been guilty; any gross and single act of injustice, profaneness, licentiousness, falsehood, or the like, which

at any time may have been committed by us. But we must not confine the expression to this meaning; for it more properly signifies all the collective sin of which we have been guilty; the sin, as it were, of our whole lives. All our early and habitual transgressions of the Divine Law; all our offences, at any time committed against God, our neighbour, or ourselves; the evil words which we may have spoken; the wicked thoughts which we may have entertained; our want of improvement of the talents intrusted to our keeping; our unfaithfulness to our covenant engagements; whatever we have done that we ought not to have done, or whatever we have left undone that we ought to have done;—these things all taken together form *our sin*. Now, in what sense is it said, that this our sin *will find us out?* To understand the force of this expression, we must remember that sin necessarily brings with it, in its train, certain evil consequences. It entails them on the sinner. For a time he may not experience them; he may seem to have avoided them, to have put himself out of their reach, to have escaped from their power; but at length, they will overtake him, and seize him. Sin has a demand against him. For a season, he may appear

to elude the demand, and to conceal himself from the search of his creditor. But at last he will *be found out.* His retreat will be discovered: payment will be urged, and the debt enforced. He will feel the consequences of his sin. More clearly, then, to see the meaning of this expression, we must enquire what these consequences are. When we understand what the sinner thus detected feels and undergoes, we shall more distinctly perceive what is meant by his sin having *found him out.*

Now these consequences are three; Fear, Shame, and Death. Sin necessarily brings these evils with it in its train. We need only look at the first sin, which was committed by man in the world, to see the way in which these three evils follow Sin. When our first parents had broken God's commandment, and had eaten the forbidden fruit, what were the consequences of their transgression? They were *afraid,* and hid themselves from the presence of God. They were *ashamed,* and made themselves aprons. They became mortal and subject to *natural* death; they lost their *spiritual* life; they passed under the sentence of *eternal death.* Thus, their sin "found them out." It found them out *speedily.* It overtook and seized on them *without delay.* But this is

not necessarily the case. Men do not *always* feel the consequences of sin, so soon as they have committed it. They may sin, and yet have no *immediate alarm* on account of their sin. Their conscience may not be roused. Their fears may not be excited. They may entertain no apprehension of their guilt, nor be terrified at the judgement, to which they have exposed themselves. — Again, they may not *at once* be *ashamed* of what they have done. They may feel no distress of this kind at the thought of their sin. Shame generally springs from the idea that our sin is known to others. But men may have sinned so secretly; they may have taken such pains to hide their sin from other people, and, for the present, may so successfully prevent it from being discovered; as, on this account, to have no unpleasant feelings. — Further, they may not *immediately* feel any of the punishment of sin. Not only are their lives preserved; but their health and strength are continued; their worldly affairs prosper; no particular calamities befall them; no peculiar mark of God's displeasure against them appears. But because their sin has not yet "found them out," will it therefore never find them out? Because it has not yet overtaken them, will it therefore never overtake them? Far

otherwise will be the case. "Evil pursues Sinners;" and whatever they may think or feel, their sin will one day find them out. A day is coming, in which conscience will be roused, and their *fear* excited. Their sins, however long forgotten or habitually unnoticed, will be placed in order before them, and will strike terror into their soul. A day is coming, in which they will be filled with *shame* and confusion of face. Their sins, however secretly committed, or artfully concealed, will be brought to light: and conscious of their wickedness, they will long to hide their guilty heads. A day is coming, in which the *sentence* denounced against transgressors will at length be executed. Their judgement, though for a long time it linger, will linger no longer; their damnation will slumber no more, They will have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. — This then is what is meant by our sin finding us out. It will bring on us Fear, Shame, and Death. I go on to show,

II. The Certainty that it will do so. *

* The Writer in this Division of the Discourse acknowledges with gratitude his obligations to the Skeleton of a sermon on the same text in that valuable Work, "Helps to Composition," by the Rev. Charles Simeon.

"Be sure your sin will find you out." I have already noticed the proneness of men to presume that their sin will *not* find them out, as well as the ruinous consequences, which flow from this presumption. They think that they shall escape at last: therefore they sin on without fear. They have no anxiety on account of the sins already committed, nor any apprehension about those which they are going to commit. But what ground have they for this vain and wicked presumption? Nothing can be more certain, than that their *sin will find them out.* That it will do so, we have the strongest possible assurance.

In the first place, the *Perfections of God* absolutely forbid that sin should go unpunished. God is *present* at *all times* and in *every* place. He filleth all in all. Nothing therefore can be hidden from Him. No sin, however secretly committed, or studiously concealed, is unseen by Him. He is also *perfect* in *Knowledge,* and knoweth all things. He therefore remembereth all things. Men forget their sins: but they cannot be forgotten by God. God is also *Holy.* He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity." As such then He must hate sin. It must be infinitely offensive to Him. Further, God is most

Just. He loveth Righteousness, and executeth Judgement. As a righteous Judge, then, He cannot but be concerned to punish sin: for not to punish it would be unjust. It would not be to treat sin according to its deserts, which would be injustice. Besides, God is *True* and *Faithful* to his word. He is *Truth* itself, and cannot lie. How is it possible then that He should not punish sin, for He hath declared that He will punish it, that He "will by no means clear the guilty?" * Put all these things together. God sees sin: He remembers sin: He hates sin: He cannot be just without punishing sin: and He has said that He will punish it. With what certainty do these Perfections of the Almighty declare, that a man's sin will surely find him out. Only let us consider, that to entertain the contrary presumption, to suppose that sin will escape unpunished, is in fact to strike at the root of the Divine Character, to deny one at least, if not all, of the Glorious Perfections of the Godhead. To say that our sin will not find us out, is to say, either that God does not see sin; or that He will forget it; or that He does not hate it; or that He is unjust; or that He will not keep his word. And which of these things will

* Exodus, xxxiv. 7.

a man presume to say? Or which of them, if he did presume to say it, would be true? God in his very nature must be infinite in all his Perfections; and so surely as He is so, so surely unrepented, unpardoned sin will not go unpunished.

In the second place, *the many* remarkable *Instances* of sin being detected and punished in this world, strongly confirm the truth under consideration. The Scriptures afford several examples of this kind. We have a very striking instance in the seventh chapter of the Book of Joshua. At the taking of the city of Jericho by the Israelites, a certain man among them, named Achan, contrary to the express command of God, had taken to himself a part of the spoil of the place, and had buried it in the earth in the midst of his tent. He had conducted the matter with great secrecy and art; had used every precaution, to prevent a discovery; and doubtless presumed, even if the commission of the theft should become known, that among so many thousands of people he should not be detected. But his presumptions were utterly vain. The Lord saw his iniquity, and brought it to light. He directed the lot to be cast, and it fell upon Achan; who being thus pointed out as the offender, was instantly put to death. — Take another in-

stance from the fifth chapter of the second Book of Kings. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, under a false pretence, had obtained from Naaman the Syrian, two talents of silver, and two changes of raiment; and without his master's knowledge, had secretly conveyed them to the house. He thought to have escaped detection, and added a lie in order to hide his guilt. But lo! his sin found him out. The Lord, by his Spirit, revealed the matter to the Prophet; and the leprosy, of which Naaman had been cured, was assigned as a punishment to Gehazi and his seed for ever. — Look next at the example of Ananias and Sapphira, in the New Testament.* They privily joined together in an impious design of making it appear that they had sold their possession for less than they really received for it. But did not their sin find them out? Did not God, in a most aweful manner, testify his knowledge of their sin, and his abhorrence of it? They both, one after the other, fell down dead at the Apostle's feet. — These are some of the instances recorded in Scripture, of the remarkable way in which sin has sometimes been found out, detected, and punished. — And have we not occasionally ourselves witnessed ex-

* Acts, v. 1—11.

amples of the same kind? Cannot we recollect instances, in which God in a very unexpected and even wonderful manner has brought to light sins, which had been secretly committed, perhaps even many years ago, and when every seeming probability of detection was at an end? Has it not sometimes happened, that a man has even become his own accuser? Unable to bear the clamours and stings of conscience, he has confessed his own guilt, and has given himself up to punishment. Now what do these things prove, but that God will certainly bring to light the hidden things of darkness? We see how easily He can do it? He has done it in some instances, to show that, in due time, He will assuredly do it in all. He thus directs sin to find out *some* sinners here, to convince us that it will find out *every* sinner hereafter.

But, in the third place, should a doubt yet remain on our minds, the *Appointment of a day of final retribution* may and must entirely remove it. "God has appointed a day, in which He will judge the world:" the day of the Revelation of his righteous judgement, when "He will render to every man according to his works." Now to what end can such a day be appointed, except it be to deal with sinners according to their de-

serts? Or how can God deal with sinners according to their deserts, without bringing their sins to light, and inflicting the punishment which they deserve? If God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, (whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead,) even Jesus Christ," then it is most certain, that men will be called to account for their sins: then it is most certain, that none of those vain excuses, by which they now try to hide or lessen their sins, will be of any use. The secrets of all hearts shall be revealed; every covering shall be stript away; and sin shall receive its just recompence of reward.

On the whole, my Brethren, let us weigh well the force of these united arguments. Sin will be punished: for the Perfections of God forbid it to be otherwise. The many remarkable Instances, in which sin has been already detected and punished, prove it. The Appointment of a Day of Judgement confirms it. Whatever other things, then, we may be ignorant of: whatever other things we may doubt of: yet let us know *this* for a certainty, that sin will be

punished. — " Be sure your sin will find you out."

With this great truth then deeply impressed on your hearts, I would now proceed to make a suitable application of it. Call to mind your own sins. Try to remember how many and how great they have been. From the day of your birth to the present day, how numerous have been your violations of the law of God! How often have you offended Him in thought, word, and deed! What provocations have you been guilty of! How great has been your unbelief of His word, your disregard of His Gospel, your unfaithfulness to your engagements! Hitherto perhaps you have taken little notice of your sins. You have studiously concealed them from others. You have endeavoured to forget them yourselves. You have felt little or no concern about them. But God hath not forgotten them. They are all in His remembrance. They are all written in His book. He overlooks none of them. He sees them every one as distinctly as on the day in which they were committed. You perhaps may have thought your sins to be few or little. You may have supposed that there has not been much evil in them. You may have flattered yourselves that there has been

something peculiar in your case, which has made your sins excusable, and has greatly lessened their guilt. But God does not see them in this way. He knows that they are neither few nor little. He knows that they have been without excuse. He sees them with all their aggravation. — What then will you do? Will you still deny them? Will you any longer attempt to hide them? Will you persist in extenuating them? Rather seek to find them out; for otherwise they will find you out at the last. Rather, with penitent, contrite hearts, confess them to the Lord; and with unreserved acknowledgements of your guilt and misery, cast yourselves on the Divine Mercy. Embrace with thankfulness that way of escape which is provided for you in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not the sin which you have hitherto committed that will prove your ruin, if you will but *now* repent of it and forsake it, and seek forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ. This blood cleanseth from all sin. Wash in this fountain, and "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Flee to this Saviour; and your sins, though many, shall be forgiven you. They shall never find you out. Of this truth, we have as full assurance as of the

one which we have been considering. The same *Perfections of the Almighty*, which require the punishment of every impenitent sinner, are equally pledged to ensure the pardon of every penitent Believer in Jesus Christ. We have the most authentic and astonishing *Instances* of God's mercy in Christ, and of his readiness to pardon even the Chief of Sinners, through this precious blood-shedding. The *Appointment of the Day of Judgement* abundantly confirms the same Truth: for it is appointed no less for the complete justification of Believers in Christ, than for the final condemnation of every unbeliever. Let this blessed assurance then dwell richly in your minds. Confess, lament, and forsake your past wickedness. Believe in Jesus Christ for the removal of your guilt. Seek of him his new-creating Spirit to convert and purify your soul. Lead a new life in dependence on his grace; and be sure that thus your sin will *not* find you out. The Lord will be "faithful and just to forgive you your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

Nor let the sincere and established Christian deem this to be a subject in which he has no concern. True it is, if you have really fled to Christ for refuge, and are

built upon this rock, that your iniquities are pardoned, never more to be mentioned against you. Great as may have been in former times even your habitual violations of the Divine Law; grievous as may have been your provocations: yet if you have been effectually brought to Jesus Christ, God forbid that the recollection of these things should interrupt your present happiness, or cast a gloom over your present hopes, or prevent you from rejoicing in your present privileges! Only see that you rejoice with trembling. Be not high-minded, but fear. See that you relax not your watchfulness, your strivings against sin. See that it get not advantage over you. Beware of presumption; beware of sinning that grace may abound. Trifle not with temptation. Keep your heart with all diligence. Think not, because you are a child of God, that you may venture with safety on forbidden ground. If you thus tempt the Lord, you have no security of being kept from falling. If you return to folly, He may withdraw his protecting grace, and may leave you in the hands of your enemies. And though, in His great mercy and faithfulness, He may not utterly cast you off, yet "be sure your sin will find you out." He will bring it to your re-

membrance, and will set before you the things which you have done. He "will bring you into the wilderness of his people; and there will He plead with you face to face." He "will cause you to pass under the rod, and will bring you into the bond of the covenant." "Though his loving-kindness He may not utterly take from you, nor suffer his truth to fail; yet He will visit your offences with the rod, and your sin with scourges." He will compel you to know that it is "an evil thing and bitter, to have forsaken the Lord your God." He will punish your unfaithfulness. He will make you ashamed of your backslidings. Days and months, nay, years of sorrow, darkness, and dismay, may be the fruit of your transgression. Remember David's sin. It was secretly committed. It was artfully concealed. But it found him out. A special Messenger was sent on purpose to detect it. And though it was pardoned, yet it was attended with a most signal and afflictive correction. And, if *you* sin, shall *you* escape? Shall *you* go unchastised? Entertain not such a thought. Fear then to offend. Watch and be sober. Bear in mind that you are encompassed with enemies. Remember where your strength lies. Live by faith. Walk in the Spirit.

Touch not the unclean thing. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things you shall never fall.

SERMON XVII.

THE WEDDING-GARMENT.

MATTHEW, xxii. 11, 12, 13.

And when the King came in to see the Guests, he saw there a man, which had not on a Wedding-Garment. And he said unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a Wedding-Garment? And he was speechless. Then the King said to the Servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

THERE cannot be a stronger proof of the desperate wickedness of the human heart, than that men should attempt to impose upon God; and yet it is an attempt made every day. In all ages of the Church, it is to be feared, that there have been some who have outwardly joined themselves to the Lord's people, while inwardly they have had no pretensions to that character. By

taking up a profession of religion, they have deceived their fellow-creatures, and have passed in the world for religious persons, even while their hearts have been full of ungodliness and sin. But God sees through every disguise. He distinguishes the true character of men with infallible certainty. He now notices the specious pretender to religion. He will ere long bring to light his hypocrisy, and will at last load him with merited infamy and punishment.

These truths are strikingly represented to us in the text. The passage is the conclusion of the parable of the Marriage-Feast, but comprises a distinct and separate subject. The man who had intruded himself into the Marriage-Feast without having on a wedding-garment, represents the person who calls himself a Christian, joins in the ordinances of Christ, mingles with his people, and claims an interest in their privileges; while at the same time he possesses not those marks, which really distinguish and characterise true Christians. Such a person may possibly escape human detection. But God will at length expose him and bring him to judgement.

For the more profitable discussion of this subject, let us separately consider the three particulars here related of the person in question.

I. His Detection.
II. His Trial.
III. His Sentence.

I. His Detection.

"When the King came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a Wedding-Garment." In this parable, we are told, that a certain King, having made a marriage for his son, when every thing was ready, sent forth his servants into the highways, to invite all whom they found to partake of the feast. By this means a great number of persons were gathered together; and "the wedding was furnished with guests." Among these however there was one, who in a very essential point differed from the rest. He "had not on a Wedding-Garment." He was not clothed in such a manner as the occasion required, and custom prescribed: and on this account he was in fact an intruder, by his presence disgraced the entertainment, and had no business there. — It may perhaps be objected, that this man could not have made his appearance otherwise than he did: that he was called out of the highway into the feast: that he could not be reasonably expected to carry with him a Wedding-Garment on the road; and consequently that it would be unjust to blame him for what

he had no power to prevent or remedy. It is not improbable, but that this objection may have occasionally occurred, to our minds. But it is an objection that may be easily removed by adverting to a circumstance, which, though not mentioned in the parable, is clearly implied in it. It was a general custom in those times and countries at great entertainments, such as this in the parable is represented to have been, for the master of the feast to furnish his guests with apparel suited to the solemnity. Now we must without doubt conclude that this was done on the present occasion. The man who came to the feast without a Wedding-Garment, had been *offered* one. But this offer, frome some motive or other, he had rejected. He perhaps undervalued the honour conferred on him in being asked to the feast: he had low conceptions of the dignity and majesty of the King, who had invited him: so long as he obtained admission to the entertainment, he cared little whether his appearance was such as, in fact, it ought to have been; or perhaps he was too proud to be seen in clothes which did not belong to him: or, possibly he thought his own sufficiently good for the occasion, and it may be even better, than those which were offered to him: and it is not

improbable, that while greatly inferior in quality and value, they might bear some little resemblance to them in form and colour; for we do not find that his fellow-guests took any particular notice of him, or observed the difference between his garment and theirs. However, when the King came in to see the guests, he instantly perceived the difference. His eye glancing over the numerous visitors assembled, at once detected the offender, and brought his offence to light.

In this parable, by the feast provided is intended to be set forth the rich provision made for our souls in the Gospel of Christ, whom God has given to be the Bridegroom of the Church. The servants of the King are the ministers of the word, who are directed to publish abroad the glad tidings of Salvation in the name of Jesus Christ, and to invite sinners of every description, to forsake the highway of destruction, and to feast on the glorious blessings laid up for them in Christ. Roused by the gracious invitation, many professedly accept it. "The wedding is furnished with guests." Numbers call themselves the Disciples of Christ, and outwardly embrace his religion. But, as St. Paul tells us was the case with the Jews, "they were not all Israel, which

are of Israel *;" so it is in the Christian church: they are not all true Christians who profess to be so. Not all who appear desirous of sharing the feast, have on the Wedding-Garment. The parable, indeed, describes but *one* offender among all the company assembled. In this respect, however, we are not to consider it as intending to convey an exact representation of the truth. The reason why one only is mentioned in the parable, may perhaps be this: not to denote that the characters of the kind described are *few* in number, and rarely to be found, but to intimate, that though they should be few, they will not on that account escape detection. Though there should be only *one* professor in the whole church of Christ, who has not on a Wedding-Garment, yet *that one* will surely be discovered by the piercing eye of God, which penetrates through every covering, and sees distinctly every heart. One thief, in the whole camp of Israel, was not concealed from God: nor was one righteous man in Sodom overlooked by Him. Let no one think then that he shall escape detection, because he may stand single in iniquity. As numbers cannot protect, so neither can they hide him. Be he the only

* Romans, ix. 6.

one among all the guests that has not on a Wedding-Garment, the Lord now surely marks him, and will eventually expose him. But what then is the Wedding-Garment? This is a most important question, to which I will endeavour, plainly and satisfactorily to reply. It is clear that the Wedding-Garment is something, which distinguishes the true Christian from the false one. It is equally clear, that it cannot be the outward conduct which is meant by this expression; for then it would be discerned by the guests as plainly as by the King. Should any one, who professes to be a Christian, live in the allowed practice of any known and open sin, in visible habits of injustice, of impurity, of intemperance, of profane conversation, in the indulgence of malicious and uncharitable tempers, in the neglect of relative duties, or of religious ordinances, we should at once clearly know, that his profession of Christianity must be vain. There would be no difficulty in detecting such a man; for he would carry the marks of his hypocrisy on his forehead. But the Wedding-Garment is something hidden and retired: something which escapes human observation, and is seen only by God. And what can this be but the inward state and disposition of the heart? To have on the

Wedding-Garment is to have the heart right with God. And when is the heart right with God, but when it is humbled under a deep sense of its own unworthiness; when it rests with a believing trust on the merits of Christ alone for forgiveness and acceptance; when it hates and avoids all sin, and desires to love and please God? This state of heart is the true Wedding-Garment. This state of heart is what distinguishes the real Christian from the pretended one. And let it also be remarked, that this Wedding-Garment, like the one spoken of in the parable, is freely offered to all, to whom the gospel-invitation is sent. The Holy Spirit of God is ever ready to work in them faith and holiness; and for these ends he is promised to their earnest prayers. The professor of Christianity, who from whatever motive rejects these offers, remains like the man in the parable without a Wedding-Garment. His heart is not right with God. He is not humbled for sin, but is secretly lifted up with pride. He does not really lay hold on Christ for pardon, but depends on his own merits. He does not hate sin, and desire to love God; but in truth, loves sin and hates God; for the carnal mind is enmity against God. Now such a man, while his outward conduct is moral and specious, may pass in

the world for a Disciple of Christ; for "man seeth not as God seeth." But the Lord sees him to be what he really is, a whited sepulchre, a painted hypocrite. He sees him destitute of faith and holiness, and consequently not having on the Wedding-Garment.

We proceed to consider,

II. The *Trial* of the man who was thus detected. Undiscovered, unsuspected by his Companions at the Feast, he was doubtless promising to himself much pleasure and enjoyment; when his hopes suddenly experienced the most bitter disappointment. He was awakened from his presumptuous security, by a question of a kind, and from a quarter, which he did not expect. "The King said unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a Wedding-Garment?" We may conceive his surprise and terror at this alarming question; a question which at once charged him with his guilt, and called upon him to defend it. The very title, indeed, by which he was addressed, conveyed the most severe and cutting reproof—"*Friend!*" He pretended to be a Friend; but was he really such? Did he deserve the name and character which he assumed? Was he not an *Enemy* in disguise? What excuse could he urge in

extenuation of his guilt? "How camest thou in hither, not having on a Wedding-Garment?" 'What canst thou say in thy 'defence? Didst thou not know that it 'was required of thee, to have on a Wed-'ding-Garment, and that to come to the 'Marriage without one was the greatest 'affront to the Master of the Feast? How 'couldest thou dare to act in so offensive a 'manner? Didst thou presume to hope 'that thou shouldest escape detention? 'Didst thou suppose that thy conduct 'would not be resented by the King, or 'would not be punished by Him?' Such was the import of the question. What answer did he make? None. — A consciousness of guilt stopped his mouth. "He was speechless." And this circumstance clearly confirms the statement already made, that this man *might* have had on a Wedding-Garment, if he had not wilfully rejected it. For, had this not been the case, he would have had something to urge in his behalf. He *might* and doubtless *would* have pleaded the impossibility of obtaining a suitable garment for the occasion. But he knew that such a plea would be of no avail. He knew that pride, and obstinacy, and a criminal disrespect for the King, had been the secret causes of his not appearing in the dress re-

quired. His own conscience condemned him. "*He was speechless.*" — Such will be the confusion of the hypocrite, when put upon his trial: of the man, who calling himself a Christian, is destitute of that state of heart, which distinguishes the true servant of Jesus Christ: of the man, who coming to the Gospel Feast, has not on the Wedding-Garment of faith and holiness. What consternation and dismay will he experience, when the language in the text shall be addressed to him! What reply will he make to the charge preferred against him, "How camest thou in hither, not having on a Wedding-Garment?" 'How 'couldest thou pretend to call thyself a 'Christian, when, in the pride and pre-'sumption of thy heart, thou wert secretly 'depending on thine own righteousness 'instead of on the righteousness which 'I had wrought out for thee? How 'couldest thou dare to claim an interest 'in the privileges and happiness of my 'people, when in thine heart thou re-'tainedst iniquity, and secretly lovedst the 'wages of unrighteousness? True, thou 'wert by nature carnal and unholy: and 'by practice thou hadst corrupted and 'hardened thy heart; but did I not offer 'to change and renew thy nature, and to

'soften and purify thy heart? When didst 'thou ever earnestly pray to me, to deliver 'thee from thy sins, and to put my fear 'within thee, and to sanctify thee wholly 'by my grace? Didst thou foolishly sup-'pose that I could be imposed on, by the 'outward appearance? Didst thou wickedly 'imagine, that I would not resent, or punish 'the iniquity of those, who draw near to 'me with their lips, while their hearts are 'far from me? Do not I search the heart? 'Do not I require truth in the inward 'parts? Answer me now, if thou art able? 'and offer some excuse for thy guilt.'— How will the man endure these searching questions? He will be *speechless.* Guilt, conscious guilt, will stop his mouth. Detected, exposed, and confounded, he will have nothing to say. — Attend then,

III. To his Sentence.

"Bind him hand and foot; and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Such was the sentence denounced on the man by the King, in the Parable; and such will be the sentence denounced on the false Christian by Christ, at the day of Judgement. The King commanded his servants to seize the offender, and to bind him hand and foot. This was the first part

of his punishment. He was reduced to a helpless and a degraded state. In like manner the angels will be sent forth to sever the tares from the wheat, and to bind them in bundles for the fire. In that day hypocrites and unbelievers will be unable to help themselves. All resistance will be vain. They will find it as impossible to elude or withstand the ministry of Justice, as they have found it impossible to escape detection. They will be bound hand and foot. — "Take him away, and cast him into outer darkness." This was the other part of the sentence pronounced on the irreverent intruder into the Feast. He had seen the rich entertainment that was provided; but he was not allowed to partake of it. He was instantly to be dragged from the sumptuous feast, from the splendid palace, from the happy company, and to be cast into a dark and loathsome dungeon. Under this terrible but merited change of circumstances, how painful would be his feelings! How bitter would be his self-reproaches at the recollection of the happiness he had lost, through his own fault and folly! Far more painful will be the feelings, far more bitter will be the self-reproaches of the false disciple; when sentenced to *depart* from Christ, he shall be cast into the prison of

hell: when he shall "see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the Prophets in the Kingdom of God, and himself thrust out:" when he shall find his presumptuous hopes of happiness blasted in a single moment, and nothing left him but a tormenting thought of the bliss which he has lost, and a dreadful experience of the misery which he has incurred. Then indeed will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Excessive Grief and horrible Rage will seize and torture him; and there will be no rest day nor night for ever and ever.

Surely the representation of this awful scene suggests an important question to ourselves: have *we* on the Wedding-Garment? We are all professedly the Lord's guests. We meet together in this house to feast on those precious mercies, which He dispenses to us in his ordinances. Does He find *no* hypocrite among us? Does he find *no* enemy, *no* traitor assuming the false appearance of a friend? As his searching eye passes on from soul to soul, can He say of every heart, "*It is right with me?*" Sin indeed, great sin, He sees in every heart; but does He see that it is sin disallowed, resisted, hated? Does he see that it is sin against which we strive, and watch, and pray? Does he see us deeply humbled

under a sense of our depravity? Does he see us casting off all pretensions of our own righteousness, those natural garments which cannot hide our shame, and desirous only of being found in him, that we may be clothed in his righteousness, even the righteousness which is of God by faith? Have *we* thus *put on* Christ? Let us judge ourselves, that we be not judged of the Lord. We cannot deceive Him; let us not deceive ourselves. — But should Conscience testify against us; should it whisper to our hearts, that we have not as yet the Wedding-Garment; what are we to do? Are we to sink under the conviction? Are we to lie down in utter despair? If we should have reason to fear that notwithstanding our past professions, we are as yet wanting in those spiritual desires, those holy dispositions, which distinguish the true Christian; are we to give up all hope of obtaining them? Are we to say, in utter despondency, 'Hi-'therto my heart has been wrong; and it is 'now impossible that it should ever be made 'right. Hitherto I have only deceived my-'self and others. I have presumptuously sup-'posed myself a Christian, without any real 'pretensions to the name. It is now too late 'to be renewed unto repentance. I see that 'I have not on a Wedding-Garment: there-

'fore nothing remains for me but outer dark-'ness and gnashing of teeth?' — Are we to use such language? God forbid! The things which accompany salvation, the things of which we stand in need, may still be our's. The same gracious King who has invited us to the marriage is still ready to provide us with a suitable Garment also. In His name it is still offered to us. In His name we may be assured, that if convinced of our past irreverence, presumption, and neglect, we are humbly desirous of being made fit and worthy for partaking of the Feast, such a desire is not even now too late. Only let us give up ourselves wholly to Him. Let us yield our hearts to Jesus Christ, and He will work in them all those dispositions, which characterise and adorn his people. Let us deprecate his wrath, and implore his pardon; and He will not upbraid us, nor retain his anger for ever. Let us pray to Him, and He will implant and strengthen in us faith and holiness. He will teach, and will enable us to put off the old man, and to put on the new. He will cover us with his most perfect righteousness; that garment of salvation, in which the Saints are clad. Though, like the Prodigal, we come to Him in shame and sorrow, yet He will meet us with tokens of reconciliation; will receive us as his chil-

dren; will put on us the best robe, and hide our guilt. Let us then come to Him with one heart and with one mind. Let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us be found *in Him.* Having on this Wedding-Garment, let us come to the marriage: "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." *

* Rev. xxii. 17.

SERMON XVIII.

YOUTH SOLEMNLY ADMONISHED.

ECCLESIASTES, xi. 9.

Rejoice, O Young Man, in thy Youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy Youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into Judgement.

"ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."* This is the testimony which St. Paul, himself an inspired writer, bears to the sacred Writings. Whenever we read or hear the Bible, let us remember this testimony; and recollect by *whom*, as well as for *what* purpose the Scriptures were given. They were given by inspiration of God: and they were given for our profit.

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

May He enable us to make a profitable use of that passage which has been read for the text; "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement."

These are the words of Solomon, who, like the other inspired penmen, "Spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost." They are addressed, as we see, to a young man. "Rejoice, O young Man, in thy Youth." — We are not however to suppose, that there was some particular Young Man, to whom they were exclusively addressed. They are spoken to any, and to every Young Man. Neither need we confine the expression even to Young *Men*. It may be understood as including young persons also of the other sex. We shall see that the address itself equally belongs to them: that in fact it applies generally to youth: to all without exception, whether male or female, who are young. — It is in this sense that I purpose to consider the passage. And with this view, I would earnestly and affectionately request the serious and particular attention of all those who are thus more immediately interested in the subject.

For the clearer explanation of the passage, we must understand the Royal Preacher as making two suppositions respecting the person whom he here addresses.

1st. That he is bent on leading a life of pleasure and enjoyment, on gratifying *his own* inclinations, and doing *his own* will: and,

2dly. That he will not be dissuaded from these purposes by the advice or example of *others;* that he refuses to profit by *their* experience, but is resolved to make trial for himself; and is sanguine in his expectations of happiness, notwithstanding the vanity and disappointment which *they* have met with in similar paths.

Such are the suppositions which must be here understood with respect to the person addressed. And are not these suppositions correct and well-founded with respect to Youth in general? Are not young persons naturally distinguished by a strong disposition to enjoy themselves, and to take their pleasure; and by as strong an indisposition to listen to advice, and to be guided by the experience of others? Bent on pleasing and gratifying themselves, they enter without fear on the paths of vanity and sin; while presumptuous, and self-confident, they shut both their ears and eyes against admonition

and example. Does not experience justify this representation? Nay, let me appeal to their own hearts. Let me put it to their own consciences to say, whether this be not a true picture of themselves. You, who are now in the bloom and vigour of youth, look into yourselves; examine your hearts; and say, is it not secretly your desire and purpose to lead a life of pleasure, and enjoyment, to indulge your own taste, and to do whatever may please, amuse, or gratify yourself? To this end, is it not your wish to be freed from all restraint, to drive away serious thoughts, and to be allowed without opposition or control to follow the bent of your own inclinations? Do you not intend within yourselves, so far as you may have it in your power, to put these desires and purposes into practice? And do not you flatter yourselves, that in doing thus you shall find happiness; that the more you have your own way, the happier you shall be; and that through your own prudence and foresight, your good fortune, or good management, you shall escape the snares and evils into which others have fallen? I ask, are not these your secret thoughts, and purposes? If they are, you exactly answer to the person addressed in the text, and with the greatest reason and propriety may your-

self be addressed in the same words. In this case, it may be said to you, to every one who is included in this description, "Rejoice, O young Person, in thy youth." — 'Seeing 'thou art thus disposed and determined to 'give up thy Youth, to folly, vanity, and 'sin; to take thy pleasure; to follow the 'devices and desires of thine own heart: 'seeing that thou art thus resolved to 'throw off all restraint, to shut thy ears to 'reproof, and with thine eyes open to ven-'ture on those slippery paths, in which so 'many have perished in your sight: seeing 'this to be the case — Go and do as thou 'intendest: "And let thy heart cheer thee 'in the days of thy youth." Fulfil thy pur-'poses. Follow thy pleasures. Take thy 'fill of enjoyment. "Walk in the ways of 'thy heart, and in the sight of thy eyes." 'Gratify thy inclinations. Please thyself 'to the full. But remember what is to 'follow. A dreadful Reckoning awaits 'thee. Do whatever thy heart thus inclines 'thee to do: but do it at thy peril. For '"know thou, that for all these things God 'will bring thee into judgement." To Him 'thou art responsible for all thy doings. To 'Him thou must give account for this loss 'of time: for this waste of health and 'strength; for this abuse of gifts and ta-

'lents; for these depraved inclinations; for 'these sensual desires; for these head-'strong passions; for this presumptuous 'self-will; for this deafness to reproof; for 'this blindness to danger; for this dislike 'of God's service; for this contempt of his 'favour; for this daring provocation of his 'Wrath. Let this statement rouse and 'alarm thee. Let the thoughts of a Judge-'ment to come arrest thee in thy course, 'and lead thee now, that thy heart is ten-'der, and thy conscience as yet not hard-'ened, to desist from thy foolish purposes, 'and turn and cleave unto the Lord thy 'God.'

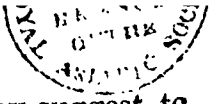
Such appears to be the full meaning of this animated address. May it be duly impressed on all your hearts! Especially may you feel and retain a deep conviction, a lively apprehension of the certainty, of the reality of a Judgement to come! Such a conviction, such an apprehension will furnish one of the most powerful checks to your youthful propensities. It will be one of your best preservatives against folly and sin. — But on this very account, in exact proportion to what ought to be your labour and study to fix this truth deeply, and permanently in your hearts, will it be the labour and study of your great Adversary the

Devil, to root out, and efface it. He will try by every art, either to make you altogether disbelieve it, or to keep it so entirely out of your sight, as to render even the professed belief of it of no real use. And while so great is *his* subtlety, and *your* depravity, while such is *his* forwardness to deceive you, and *your* readiness to be deceived, is there not reason to dread the consequences? He will suggest to *you*, as he suggested to Eve, ' " You shall not surely ' die." You shall not certainly be brought ' into Judgement. Or, admitting that you ' may be, yet allowances will be made for ' youthful sins. God will not judge you ' for irregularities, to which your time of life ' so naturally leads, and for which, even ' though there may be harm in them, you ' have so good an excuse to plead.' These will be Satan's insinuations to your mind. Perhaps he already urges you by such thoughts as these to rejoice in your Youth, and to walk in the ways of your Heart, and in the sight of your Eyes. In what manner then can one, who has your best interests at heart, more effectually show his readiness to serve you, than by exposing the fallacy of these reasonings, and by thus endeavouring to strengthen you against their force?

Is it secretly suggested to your Heart that

you shall not certainly be brought into Judgement? Yield not to such a suggestion; no not for a moment. Meet it, as it ought to be met, with the positive declarations of Scripture. There you are expressly told, that "God *will* bring you into judgement;" "that we *must* all appear before the Judgement-Seat of Christ;" that the "Books will be opened," and that we "shall be judged out of those things which are written in the Books according to our Works;" that God "hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."* These are God's words: the words of Him, who is Truth itself, and cannot lie. What have you to oppose to them? What have you to bring against them? Nothing but the suggestions of him, who is a Liar, and the Father of Lies. Will you believe Satan rather than God? Will you give credit to one, who is your Enemy, and only seeks to deceive and ruin you, rather than to Him, who is your best and kindest Friend, and only desires to warn and save you? Surely, you cannot deliberately prefer light to darkness, truth to falsehood. You must feel convinced in your

* 2 Cor. v. 10. — Rev. xx. 12. — Acts, xvii. 31.



conscience, whatever Satan may suggest to the contrary, that you will certainly be brought into Judgement

But the other suggestion which I mentioned is more dangerous, because more subtle; and requires, therefore, to be more fully and distinctly examined, and opposed. 'Allowances' (it may be put into your mind) 'will be made for youthful Sins. 'God will not judge you for irregularities, 'to which your time of life so naturally 'leads, and for which you have so good an 'excuse to plead.' — And where do you learn that God will not judge you for these irregularities? In the text He hath expressly declared, that He will judge you for them. Can you produce a single passage of Scripture which supports a contrary doctrine? Look from one end of the Bible to the other, if there be any thing to justify, to countenance the notion that God will not take account of sins committed in Youth. Why hath He commanded us "to remember our Creator in the days of our Youth," if yet He will not punish those, who at that season of life forget Him? We are expressly told in the chapter following the text, that "God shall bring *every* work into judgement, with *every* secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

Take notice of the expressions, "*every* work," "*every* secret thing." No exceptions are made in favour of Youthful Sins. No allowance is given to them. Listen not then to a suggestion which the Word of God so positively contradicts.—Besides, are there not other ways in which the fallacy of this supposition may be clearly exposed? Does not God oftentimes judge youthful sins in this life; and thus give earnest that He will judge them in the life to come? Do you ask how He does this? I will show you two ways in which He does does it.

1st. In the course of his Providence, What we call the natural course of things, is nothing else but that regular succession of events, that certain connection between causes and effects, which God has originally appointed. Whatever therefore happens in the natural course of things may be considered as happening by Divine appointment. It is what God under those circumstances has willed should happen. But is there any thing which in the natural course of things more frequently happens, than that youthful sins are more or less punished in after-life? What are the natural consequences of early extravagance, and wastefulness, but distress, and poverty? Is a young man idle and dissipated, devoted to

frivolous pursuits, and spending his time and talents in pleasure and amusements; how certainly does he suffer for his folly and misconduct, perhaps during all the days of his life? He arrives at no eminence. He obtains no respect. He has laid no foundation for useful, rational, honourable occupations. He has provided no resources for the time when his trifling enjoyments will please no longer. He has prepared for himself a listless, discreditable, miserable old age. — Is he intemperate and licentious in the days of his youth? What does this conduct naturally entail, but disease and pain; a debilitated body, and an enfeebled mind? See him an old man, in what ought to have been the prime of his days. In the expressive language of Job, "His bones are full of the sin of his youth*:" and they soon lie down in an untimely grave. — Do you want any further proofs of the natural consequence of Youthful sins? Go to the Criminal, who has forfeited his life to the laws of his Country. Hear his dying confessions. To what cause does he ascribe his dreadful end, but to the sins and wickednesses of his Youth? 'Take 'warning' (he cries) 'by my example. 'When young I forgot God, I disobeyed

* Job, xx. 11.

'and provoked Him; and now He has 'righteously visited my offences. He left 'me to go on in the way which I had chosen. 'He has sentenced me to reap the evil which 'I sowed.' — Thus God, in the course of his Providence, frequently shows that he doth not overlook the sins committed in Youth. And if He thus judges them in this life, can you presume to hope that He will not bring them into Judgement hereafter? But farther, there is another way in which sin is often punished in this life, namely,

2. By the Strokes and Stings of Conscience. Conscience is, as it were, God's representative in our Soul. He has placed it there to remind us of our duty to Him, and to plead his cause within us. We may often silence, stupify, and deaden it; and so may prevent it from discharging its office aright. But when once awakened, it performs a faithful part. It arraigns us at the bar of God, sets all our sins before us, loads us with accusations, denounces vengeance on us, and forces us to judge and condemn ourselves. But in thus acting the accuser's part, in bringing our sins to remembrance, and setting them in order before us, does it take no notice of the Sins of our Youth? As God's faithful Minister in the Soul, does it tell a man, that these sins are of no con-

sequence, and need not be regarded? Far otherwise. On the contrary, it enforces on him the solemn declaration of the text, "For all these things God will bring thee into Judgement:" for the sins of thy Youth, as well as those of thy riper years. — In proof of this remark, look at the examples of those persons in Scripture, who are represented as being most under the influence of an awakened conscience, and see in what manner they felt and spoke upon the subject. Hear what Job declares when confessing his guilt unto the Lord; "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of *my Youth*." Hear what David says, when imploring the Divine Mercy; "Remember not the sins of *my Youth*, nor my transgressions." Attend especially to the case of the deeply penitent Ephraim, who is represented as bemoaning himself thus: "After that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh. I was ashamed, yea, even confounded," (and now mark the cause of this deep consternation,) "because I did bear the reproach of *my Youth*." * Did all these penitents thus feel, and lament the sins of their Youth, and condemn themselves on account of them? Did their

* Job, xiii. 26. — Psalm xxv. 7. — Jer. xxxi. 19.

awakened Consciences thus bring these sins to remembrance, and charge and oppress their souls with the weight of them? And will God, do you think, overlook them, or make no account of them, or not bring them into Judgement? Dismiss every such vain, prcsumptuous, unscriptural idea. Be assured that the sins and offences of your Youth will one day be the source of the most genuine sorrow. You will either lament them in this world with bitter contrition and deep self-abasement, should it please God in his mercy to bring you repentance: or you will bewail them for ever in the world to come, with unceasing but unavailing remorse and anguish.

"Therefore" (as the royal preacher adds in the verse following the text) "therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh." Lay not up for yourselves such painful consequences in store. Avoid sorrow hereafter, by avoiding sin now. Be warned in time. Rejoice *not* in the days of thy Youth, *neither* walk in the ways of thy heart, *nor* in the sight of thine eyes. Listen to the voice of friendly and sober admonition. "Be not wise in your own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil." Make religion your choice, and your practice in the days of

your Youth. "Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her." "She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire, are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness; and all her paths are peace." * Seek the Lord betimes: for "they that seek Him early shall find Him." Hear how earnestly, how tenderly he reasons, and expostulates with you. "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth?" † Comply with this reasonable request. Call him your Heavenly Father. Commit yourselves to his care and keeping. Choose him for the guide of your youth; and he will be your Protector in your riper years, your Consolation in old age, your Refuge in death, and your Portion for ever.

If this discourse has appeared to be directed to one part of the congregation with a seeming exclusion to the rest, let it be remembered that it is that part of the flock, which especially requires the Shepherd's care; and in respect of which the Chief Shepherd has said, "Feed my Lambs." —

* Proverbs, iv. 8. — iii. 15, 16, 17. † Jeremiah, iii. 4.

But, in fact, the exclusion has been more seeming than real. The discourse, though directly addressed to the Young, may yet have been profitably listened to by those who are of riper age. It may have served to remind them of the sins of their youth, and so may have disclosed to them a load of guilt which possibly they did not suspect to have belonged to them. My brethren, if this discourse should have thus opened your eyes, it has been highly profitable to you: for it is of as great consequence to you to be put in mind of the unrepented sins of your youth, as it is to the young to be seasonably warned against those sins into which they are likely to run. And if a conviction of the certainty of being brought into judgement ought to deter *them* from committing sin, the same conviction ought to lead *you* to repent of those sins which you have already committed. For except you repent of them, you must perish. Let them have been committed ever so many years ago, yet, like debts once contracted, they are still standing against you. No interval of time can take away aught from their guilt. *You* may have long forgotten them, but they are all registered with God and ready to be produced against you.

Let these things sink deep into your heart. May they be fixed there, till with Job you

are made to "possess your former iniquities:" till with David you are taught to cry out, "Remember not the sins of my Youth:" till with Ephraim you "are ashâmed, yea even confounded, because you bear the reproach of your Youth." For then will you flee for mercy, where it may be found; even to that God, who pardoneth iniquities, and blotteth out as a cloud our transgressions; even to that Saviour, whose blood cleanseth from all sin; who bids the weeping penitent rejoice, who calls to Himself the heavy-laden sinner, and promises to give him rest. Thus shalt thou find rest. Thus shalt thou rejoice. Thus shalt thou be cleansed from all sin, and shalt forget the shame of thy Youth.

SERMON XIX.

GOD'S TENDER EXPOSTULATION WITH YOUNG PERSONS.

JEREMIAH, iii. 4.

Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my Youth?

IN another discourse addressed chiefly to young persons, it was my endeavour to fix on their minds a serious impression, and to stir them up to the practice of a holy life. I now purpose to resume the attempt. But the mode which I shall adopt on the present occasion, will be different from that to which I had recourse in the former. I then pointed out to them the folly of sin: I shall now set before them the wisdom of religion. Then I attempted to alarm them, by displaying the terrors of the Lord: I shall now try to persuade them, by a display of his mercies.

With this view I have made choice of a text, in which the Lord most tenderly expostulates with them, by his prophet Jeremiah, in these very affecting words, "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, Thou art the guide of my Youth?" In an humble endeavour to exhibit the full force and meaning of this passage, I shall proceed,

I. To show the Particulars of the Proposal comprised in it: — and

II. To point out some Motives to compliance, which the text itself seems to suggest.

I. The Proposal here made to you comprises three Particulars.

1st, That you should make God your Father. For such is clearly the meaning of the Invitation, "Wilt thou not cry unto me, My Father?" — To cry unto God, "My Father!" is the same thing with calling Him "Father:" but merely to call Him so cannot be all which is here intended: since to call Him "Father" is as easy as to call Christ "Lord," which of itself, we know, will profit us nothing. The expression must evidently mean to *make* Him your Father: a Father, whom you may love, honour, and obey. It implies that you really become His children: that you look up to Him as

a Father, with reverence, affection, and awe: that you commit yourselves to his care and keeping, and with composure and confidence rely on his fatherly protection, and love. — This is what you are here invited to do. But how can you do this? Instead of being a child of God, have you not been an enemy to Him by wicked works? Have you not by disobedience forfeited his favour, and, like the Prodigal, have put yourselves out of his family? How then can you look up to him as a Father? How can you hope that He will look upon you as a child? What confidence can you have towards Him? Under such circumstances confidence will be presumption; and to rely on his fatherly care of you, altogether delusion. — This indeed would be true, had He not revealed a way, in which, notwithstanding your unworthiness and guilt, you may yet call Him Father without presumption, and find your confidence in Him to be no delusion. And that way is by believing in Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent. Believe with the heart in the Lord Jesus Christ; and all the distance which sin has made between your soul and God shall be utterly done away. He is "in Christ reconciling the world unto himself:" and in Christ you will find him a reconciled Father to you. For, as St. Paul says, "Ye are all

the Children of God by faith in Christ Jesus;" and St. John, "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."* By faith we are made one with Christ: and being one with Him, His Father becomes our Father; His God, our God. Being redeemed by his Blood from the bondage of sin and death, we receive the adoption of Sons. We are admitted into the family and household of God, and become entitled to the present privileges, and the future inheritance of that Glorious Relation. "Because Ye are Sons" (says the Apostle to the Galatians), "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father."† "Being justified by faith in Jesus Christ, we have peace with God;" and being taught and enlightened by the Holy Spirit the Comforter to see and feel ourselves at peace with Him, we learn to look up to Him with confidence, and to cry to Him indeed, "My Father!"

Here then you may more distinctly see what is meant by this part of the Proposal in the text. When the Lord proposes to you to cry unto Him, "My Father," in other words he invites you with the heart to take

* Gal. iii. 26. — John, i. 12. † Gal. iv. 6.

Christ for your Saviour, and by faith to receive Him as your all in all, "of God made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." * Are you already called a Christian, baptised into his visible Church, outwardly joining in his ordinances? It is here proposed to you to become inwardly a Christian; not to be content with merely bearing the name, but to secure to yourself all the glorious privileges which that name imports. Do you already make something more of a religious profession than you once did, than many others do? Still it is here proposed to you not to rest satisfied with such a profession. 'Come,' says the Lord, 'give me thine heart. 'Lay hold of my covenant. Behold I stand 'at the door and knock. Open unto me 'that I may enter in; and may fill, and rule, 'and bless thy soul. Thou shalt be my 'son, my daughter, my pleasant child; and 'I will be a Father, an Almighty Father to 'thee.'

2dly, The next Particular here proposed is, that you should choose God for the Guide of your Youth. This point indeed necessarily follows the other. For if you make God your Father, you cannot but choose Him for your Guide. An explanation of

* 1 Cor. i. 30.

it however will help more clearly to exhibit the full meaning of the invitation.

As to make God your Father implies that you love and fear Him, and put your whole trust in Him; so to choose Him for your Guide signifies that you regard his Authority, follow his Will, and comply with his Directions. Now, there are two ways especially, in which God makes known his Will to you, and shows what he would have you to do.

First, by his Word. The Bible, which is God's Word, is given to us on purpose to be a "light unto our feet, and a lamp unto our paths." It teaches us both by precept and example. It instructs, reproves, threatens, persuades, and encourages us. It tells us what to do, and what to leave undone; what to practise, and what to avoid. It discloses to us what is pleasing to God, and will be profitable to us; and what is displeasing to Him, and will be hurtful to us. It reveals to us Jesus Christ, "as the Way, the Truth, and the Life:" bids us to believe in Him to the saving of our souls: directs us to pray to the Father in His Name for every thing we need; and promises that out of his Fulness we shall receive a full supply for all our wants. Thus God instructs you by his Word.

And Secondly, by his Spirit. While God gives to us his Word to teach us outwardly, He vouchsafes also his Spirit to teach us inwardly. By this heavenly Monitor He enlightens, awakens, and directs our conscience. Through his secret influence on the heart, He puts into us his holy desires, and good counsels; suggests to us the way in which we ought to walk; reproves us when we go wrong; commends us when we do right; faithfully reminds us of the consequences of disobedience; and graciously sets before us the Glory that shall be revealed. In this manner you are taught by the Spirit.

When therefore God proposes to you in the text to choose Him for the Guide of your youth, He invites you in other words to give up yourselves to the blessed teaching of His Word, and of His Spirit. He says to you, 'Take the Bible for your guide and 'rule. Study it, and let it be mixed with 'faith in your heart. Believe what it re- 'veals. Practise what it commands. Take 'no other standard of right and wrong, 'but this. Be not persuaded by wicked 'and worldly men to adopt their maxims, 'and to act upon their principles. Listen 'not to their false and destructive reason- 'ing. Follow me fully; and have respect

'unto all my commandments. Attend 'especially to the motions of my Good 'Spirit in your heart. Do not resist, and 'grieve Him. Obey his gentle friendly 'voice. Refuse not any thing which He 'directs you to do. Retain nothing from 'which he requires you to part. Be assured 'that his precious consolations will abun-'dantly compensate for every loss. He 'will shed abroad within you that heavenly 'peace which passeth all understanding, 'and which the world can neither give nor 'take away.'

3dly, There is one other Particular still proposed to you in the text, namely, that you should do these things instantly without delay. "Wilt thou not *from this time* cry unto me, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my Youth?" There is in all men a sad propensity to put off the doing even of what they know to be right, and really approve. Though the judgement be convinced, yet such is the natural unwillingness of our hearts to come to God, and close with his offers, that we too often say to our conviction, as the trembling Felix said to the Apostle, "Go thy way for this time, when we have a convenient season we will call for thee." Any season but the present appears to be desirable; and while the carnal

mind, which is enmity against God, is the real cause of our delay, we flatter ourselves that those things which seem to us the causes, will in a short time cease to operate, and to oppose our course.

But God counsels you in the text to beware of this self-deception. He reminds you that there is no time like the present. ‘ “ Wilt thou not *from this time* cry unto me, ‘ My Father? To-day (says He) if you will ‘ hear my voice, harden not your heart.” ‘ Put not off to another day, no, not till ‘ to-morrow, the blessed work to which I ‘ have called you. Take Me for your ‘ Father, choose Me for your Guide, from ‘ this time, from this day. I am ready, ‘ even now, to be a Father and a Guide ‘ unto you. Be you as ready as I am: nor ‘ let a day, an hour be past, till in your ‘ heart you have joined yourself to Me in a ‘ perpetual Covenant, which shall never be ‘ forgotten.’

Such are the Particulars comprised in the Proposal in the text. I shall now endeavour,

II. To point out some Motives for compliance, which the passage itself seems to suggest.

1st, I would remind you of the *Grace and Condescension* of the Proposal here made to

you. Doth the Lord God Almighty, who dwelleth in the highest Heaven, whom the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain, doth He graciously offer to become your Father, and your Guide? Doth he condescend to invite you into his family, to entreat you to be numbered with his Children, and to entrust yourself to his Care, and Love? Surely such a Proposal, so rich and precious in itself, coming from such a quarter, urged in so free and tender a manner, ought of itself to engage and win your compliance. How will you be able to answer it to your conscience, if you should resist and reject so much mercy? How can you find it in your heart to resist and reject it?

Consider "what manner of love is this, that you should be called the Children of God!" What, infinite compassion! What boundless mercy! that the Lord should not only have provided a way, and *such* a way; a way *so* purchased, *so* provided, even with the blood of his dear Son; a way, in which you, unworthy as you are of his favour, and even justly deserving of his wrath, may yet receive the adoption of Children;—but also, that he should be the first to offer, nay, to solicit you to accept these gracious terms of peace and reconciliation! You perhaps have hitherto paid little regard to Him.

You have thought his gentle service a hard yoke. You have in your heart disliked his holy will and ways. You have got at a distance from Him: have preferred another Master, and chosen another Guide. And now what are his feelings; what is his behaviour towards you? Does He feel resentment towards you? Does He frown upon you? Does He say of you, "Let him alone, he is joined unto Idols?" Does He say to you, 'Depart from me. Be 'filled with the fruit of your own devices. 'Reap that which you have sown?'— No. He anxiously desires, and seeks your happiness. His bowels yearn over you. He longs for your return. He affectionately entreats you to come back to Him, and to share the blessings which he has provided for you. "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my Youth?" Can you withstand this pressing invitation? Are you not drawn with these cords of love? Is not your heart constrained to answer, "Thou *art* my Father, Thou *shalt* be the Guide of my Youth?"

2. I would put you in mind of the *Reasonableness* of such a proceeding. This holy choice, this wise surrender of yourself to God, how good, how profitable will it be

for you! How powerfully does your own interest lead you to comply with the Proposal in the text!

Where will you find a Father like God? who can love you as He will love you? who can provide for you as He will provide for you? Perhaps you may be already deprived of your earthly parents: or if they still be continued to you, yet you may soon be deprived of them. But if the Almighty be your Father, He will be your Father for ever. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Your earthly parents, however strong may be their love to you, however anxious their desire of doing you good, can do but little for you. There are numberless evils from which they cannot protect you. There are innumerable blessings which they can never insure to you. But your heavenly Father, if indeed you take him for your Father, is able and mighty to save, and to bless you to the uttermost.

Where also will you find such a Guide of your Youth as God? Entering on an ensnaring world, surrounded by countless temptations, solicited on every side to folly and to sin, without experience and without strength, what reason have you to accept and value the offer of a Heavenly Guide, who alone can conduct you in peace and

safety through all these intricate paths, and can bring you at last to eternal rest and happiness? Refuse the offer of his heavenly Guidance, and where will your trust be placed? You will be like a Vessel in a boisterous sea without a Pilot to direct your course. The sport of every wind, the victim of every current, you cannot but quickly split on some of those many rocks and shoals which wait for your destruction. — Then choose the Lord for your Guide. He will be with you in danger. His grace shall be sufficient for you. The winds and the waves obey his voice. He will comfort you with his presence. He will strengthen you with his Spirit. He will support you with his arm. He will preserve you from sinking. He will bring you at last into the desired haven.

3. I would call to your notice the *Seasonableness* of the Proposal in the text. "Wilt thou not *from this time* cry unto me, My Father?" Is not *this time* the most convenient, the most seasonable for the duty proposed? The time past cannot be recalled. You may deeply regret, that you have hitherto neglected to make God your Father, and to choose Him for the Guide of your youth. But regret will not recover the time which is past. Opportunities lost

are gone for ever. Your business is to improve those which remain. The present time is still your own. Notwithstanding the time that is past, and the opportunities that are lost; yet time and opportunity await you still. God still waits to be gracious. He still invites you. He still says to you, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of Salvation." Wilt thou not then *from this time* cry unto me?

It may be that there are some circumstances in your case, which give peculiar weight to this expostulation. It may be that at this present juncture the Lord is enforcing by his Providence the gracious invitations of his word. Perhaps you are under affliction. Deprived of some earthly comfort, you are feeling the vanity of the world. You are taught the folly of human dependencies. You are looking about for some better Foundation than what this world can furnish. Or possibly you are experiencing the mercy of the Lord. He has heard your cry, and has brought you out of trouble. He has raised you from the bed of sickness, and has brought you back from the brink of the grave. He has turned away some heavy calamity which you feared, and has given you joy instead of mourning. — Surely under any of these circumstances He pleads

with additional force, when He says to you, "Wilt thou not *from this time*" — this time of Affliction; this time of Deliverance; this time of Rejoicing — "Wilt thou not cry unto me, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my Youth?"

May there be some hearts present, who echo back this language! May there be some who feel the constraining influence of these united arguments; who are at this moment conscious of a secret, of an earnest desire of giving up themselves to God now in the days of their Youth! — I trust that the good Spirit of our God, which has put this desire into your heart, will enable you to fulfil it! Let me exhort you for your parts seriously to set about the solemn duty. As one step to this great end, embrace the next opportunity, which may recur, of devoting yourselves to the Lord at his Table. The blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood is that appointed ordinance, in which you may most properly renew your Christian Covenant, and present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. There the Lamb of God, who died to save you, sets forth the precious memorials of his love. There He waits to meet, to receive, to comfort, to strengthen every humble, earnest soul. — There then let it be your object,

your desire, your study to meet Him. Set your heart to the work. Pray to Him for grace to dispose and qualify you for this solemn service. Come with humility, fear, and trust. Come with repentance, faith, and love. And may the Lord make you willing in the day of his power; that so He may be your Father and your Guide in this world, and your everlasting portion and happiness in the world to come!

SERMON XX.

THE WORD OF THE LORD GLORIFIED.

2 THESSALONIANS, iii. 1.

Finally, Brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you.

AMONG the Epistles of St. Paul, there are none more pleasing and interesting than the two to the Church of Thessalonica. The Apostle seems to have felt a peculiar affection for the members of that Church, and to have reflected on the time which he had spent among them, with singular satisfaction. Indeed the success of his labours among them had been very considerable. For though he had "spoken unto them the Gospel of God with much contention;" and ever since his departure they had endured much tribulation and persecution; yet they appear, and probably from these very circumstances, to have been remarkably free from

those corruptions and divisions with which the other Christian churches were in general infected, and in a very conspicuous manner to have maintained and adorned their religious profession. Hence it is, that in these Epistles we meet with so little of censure and reproof. In respect to the Thessalonians, with a very slight exception as to some individuals, there is nothing but commendation and praise, and on the Apostle's part satisfaction and thankfulness. Thus we find in the text, that with great earnestness and humility having desired their prayers in his behalf, that "the word of the Lord might have free course;" that it might *run*, as the word literally means; he adds, and that it may "be glorified, even as it is with you." He represents the conduct of the Thessalonians not only as doing honour to the Gospel, but as doing it to such a degree as to make them even a pattern and a standard to other Churches. Nay, if other Churches did but glorify the word of the Lord as they glorified it, the Apostle's most sanguine expectations and wishes would be fully answered. "Pray that the Word of God may be glorified, *even as it is with you.*" — Now if we consider how ardent and anxious was St. Paul's desire of exalting

the Gospel, and how high were his ideas of Christian attainments, we cannot but regard his language on this occasion, as conveying a very striking commendation on the Thessalonian Church: while it naturally prompts us to enquire, what those particulars in their conduct were, which called forth these strong expressions in their favour. Nor is this an enquiry of little moment: for in whatever respects, and in whatever way the Word of the Lord was glorified by the Thessalonians; in the same respects, and in the same way, so far as circumstances will admit, it doubtless ought to be glorified by us. Let us then pursue this enquiry with a view to our self-examination and instruction.

In carefully reading over these two Epistles, to which we have referred, we shall find that the information which they furnish on the subject in question, may be considered as relating,

I. To the Way, in which the Word of the Lord had been received by the people of Thessalonica.

II. To the Change which it had wrought in those who had thus received it.

III. To the Fruit, which it had produced, and still continued to produce in them.

May the consideration of these Particulars be so blessed to us, that the Word of the Lord may run, and be glorified with us, as it was with those to whom the Apostle wrote!

I. As to the *Way*, in which the Thessalonians had received the Word of the Lord.

We know from the short account given of St. Paul's proceedings at Thessalonica, that his success in that city was very considerable, and probably very rapid. The larger number indeed of the Jews, who resided there, as in most other places where the Gospel was preached, rejected it; and soon stirred up so great a tumult and opposition against the Apostles, that they were obliged to leave the place. In the mean time however the Word of the Lord had *run* among the people: for "*some* of the Jews believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks *a great multitude*, and of the chief women *not a few*." * And St. Paul, in his first epistle, clearly countenances this opinion, when he says, "For yourselves, Brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was *not in vain:*" a mode of expression which plainly intimates that his ministry at Thessalonica had been marked

* Acts, xvii. 4.

with signal success, and had made rapid progress among the inhabitants. Indeed, he had before said, that "the Gospel had come not unto them in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;" and that they had "become followers of the Apostles, and of the Lord, having received the word (though) in much affliction (yet) with joy of the Holy Ghost." And afterwards he more expressly tells them, that he "thanked God without ceasing, because that when they received the Word of God, which they had heard of him, they had received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the Word of God." * — Putting all these passages together, we may fairly conclude, that the Thessalonian Church had glorified the Word of the Lord in the *Way*, in which they had received it. They had received it when it had been preached to them with readiness and humility. They had not cavilled at its doctrines, nor objected to its precepts. They had yielded a speedy assent to its demands, had admitted the proofs and testimonies with which it was confirmed; and believing it to be the Word of God, they had embraced it with joy; had relied on it with confidence; and had professed them-

* 1 Thess. i. 5, 6. — ii. 13.

selves (notwithstanding the afflictions and persecutions to which such a profession had exposed them) the Followers of Christ and of the Churches of God. — Now thus to receive the word of the Lord is doubtless to *glorify it.* Thus to embrace and profess the Gospel is to put honour upon the Gospel, and consequently upon Him whose Gospel it is.

Let us enquire then, whether *we* have *thus* received and honoured it? Let us seriously put the question to our own hearts. Have we glorified the word of the Lord as these Thessalonians did? Have we received it as *His* Word? Have we heard it with meekness, listened to it with attention, bowed to it with humility, and obeyed it with all readiness of mind? Have we considered without prejudice the many claims which it prefers to our attention and acceptance; the many proofs by which it is supported; the many grounds on which it demands our most implicit faith and obedience? We are indeed called Christians, and so far make a profession of embracing the Gospel. But have we *really* embraced it? Have we embraced it on conviction of its being the Word of God? Have we embraced it from a belief, that it is in truth "the Power of God unto Salva-

tion?" When the Gospel was preached to the Thessalonians, they received it with joy. Let us call to mind for how many years the joyful sound may have been proclaimed to us. And have we received it with joy? Alas! Has it not been sounded in the ears of some of us to no purpose, even to this day? Have not invitations, commands, entreaties, time after time, been urged upon us in vain? The Thessalonians received the Word with joy, even though it came accompanied with much affliction, and entailed on them great persecutions. To us it has come without these things. Surely then if we receive it not, these Converts will rise up in judgement against us and condemn us. For they glorified the Word of the Lord; but we dishonour it. They valued his gracious message; but we make light of it. They received it with gladness, and rejoiced in it under all their afflictions. We turn a deaf ear to it, and think to be happy in rejecting it. Let us remember the declaration of the Almighty, which applies to His Word no less than to Himself; "Them that honour me, I will honour; but they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed."*

Let us now consider,

II. The *Change*, which the Word of the Lord had wrought in these Thessalonians.

* 1 Samuel, ii. 30.

The Gospel, or the Word of the Lord, is the Instrument which he has appointed for the reformation of mankind: for "turning them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God." Now when the Word produces this effect; when it thus turns and changes men; then it is glorified. Its power is seen, felt, and acknowledged. All who witness the effect, must own the power of the Instrument by which it has been wrought, and must, secretly at least, confess, "This hath God done." ——How then *in this respect* had the Thessalonians glorified the Word of God? What *Change* had it wrought in them? St. Paul tells us, that it had "wrought effectually in them;" and the effect was this, "They had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven."* Before the Gospel had been preached among them, they had been Idolaters, worshipping the Creature instead of the Creator. They had been sunk in heathen ignorance and darkness, had served idols of wood and stone, and were living altogether without God in the world. But now, having received the Word with joy, they had been "brought out of darkness into marvellous light." They

* 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

had forsaken these vanities, had renounced their Idols, and had relinquished their heathen practices. Instead of the Gods many, and the Lords many, whom they had formerly served, they were now become the servants of Jehovah; they "worshipped God in the spirit and rejoiced in Christ Jesus," looking for his glorious appearance, when He should be revealed from heaven "to be glorified in his Saints, and to be admired in all them that believed." What a change was this! How clearly did it prove that the Instrument, which had wrought such an effect, was indeed "mighty in operation," "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds," "the Power of God unto Salvation!" Who could behold these Christian Converts turned from their dumb Idols to serve the Living and True God, without feeling that the Preaching of the Gospel had done great things? Wicked men indeed might resist this conviction; they might deny this conclusion. But surely every considerate mind must allow that the Word of the Lord was *glorified* in the Conversion of these Thessalonians.

Here then is another subject for enquiry. Has the Word of the Lord been *thus* glorified in us? Has it *wrought effectually* in us? Has it turned and changed us, and proved

itself to be the Word of the Lord by the evident alteration, which it has made in our hearts and lives? Perhaps it may be said, 'We have never been Gentiles. We have 'never served Idols. We have been always 'Christians. How then can *such* a Change 'as was wrought in the Thessalonians, have 'been produced in us?'—It is true, we have been Christians; so far as having belonged to the outward and visible Church can have made us Christians. But have we been Christians *within?* Has the *inner* state answered to the outward profession? Does it answer to it now? Before this can be the case, there must have been as great a *moral change* in us as there was in the Thessalonians. Let us recollect, that we were by nature Gentiles *in heart.* Our soul was estranged from God, and had no pleasure in Him. And what has our practice been? If we have been free from gross sins, and scandalous vices, yet surely we must admit that we have served divers lusts and pleasures; that we have followed the course of "this present evil world;" and have loved and served the Creature more than the Creator. And what is all this but spiritual Idolatry?—Have we then been turned from these things? In these respects has a great change been wrought in us? Have we re-

nounced these vanities, these Idols? Are we no longer living after the flesh, and the world? Has the Gospel redeemed us from our vain conversation, so that we are no longer fashioning ourselves after our former lusts in our ignorance? In a word, are we now serving the Living and True God, and waiting for his Son from heaven? Are we spiritual Worshippers of God? Do we daily prove our hearts before Him, and serve Him with our spirit in the Gospel of his Son? Are we sincere Believers in that Son? Do we depend solely on his merits and promises for pardon and strength? Do we constantly keep in mind the account which we must give to Him as our judge? And are we desirous only of "winning Him," and of "being found in Him?" If the word of the Lord have not wrought these things in our hearts; if it have not thus turned us, and brought us to be new Creatures in comparison of what we once were, it is not as yet *glorified* in us. We may have heard of its transforming power: but we have never ourselves experienced it. We are yet strangers to its gracious and mighty operations. However it may have obtained the assent of our understanding, it has never yet reached our heart, so as to have fixed itself there, and to shed abroad its heavenly in-

fluence in our soul. Let us be assured, that the Gospel has more to do *in* us, and *for* us, than we are yet aware of. God grant that it may do this! that it may come to us, as it came to the Thessalonians, not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost! So shall we find it, as they found it, "The Power of God unto Salvation."

Let us consider,

III. The *Fruit*, which the Gospel had produced, and still continues to produce, on these Thessalonian Converts.

The Preaching of the Word is frequently compared in Scripture to the sowing of seed. Now the intention of Sowing the Seed is that it may bring forth fruit: and in proportion to the Fruit produced is the Husbandman rewarded for his toil and pains. Thus in proportion to the Fruit which the Gospel produces, is God's design in publishing it answered, and his wisdom manifested. "Herein is my Father glorified (says our Saviour) that ye bear much Fruit."* The Gospel never appears so clearly to be "the Power of God and the Wisdom of God," as when those who profess to have received and embraced it show forth the Fruits of it in their life and conversation. Let us see then *how* the Thessalonian Con-

* John, xv. 8.

verts in this respect glorified the Word of God. What is the testimony which St. Paul bears to them in reference to this point? "We give thanks to God always for you all, (says the Apostle), making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing *your work of faith* and *labour of love*, and *patience of hope* in our Lord Jesus Christ." "So that ye were ensamples to all that believe, in Macedonia and Achaia; for from you sounded out the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your *faith* to God-ward is spread abroad." — "But when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your *faith* and *charity*, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your *faith*." "As touching *brotherly love*, ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another: and indeed *ye do it* towards all the Brethren, which are in all Macedonia." — "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, *even as also ye do*." "We are bound to thank God always for you, Brethren, as it is meet, because that *your faith groweth exceedingly*, and the *charity of every one of you all towards each other aboundeth*. So that we ourselves glory in you in the Churches of God for your

patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure." * — We see from these passages, what was the Fruit, in quality and in measure, which these Thessalonians bore; and how by bearing it they glorified the Gospel. They were distinguished by the exercise of those truly Christian Graces, *Faith*, *Hope*, and *Love*. They displayed these Fruits of the Spirit in their daily life and conversation; and they displayed them in a very eminent degree. Their *Faith grew exceedingly*. Their *Love abounded*. And their hope most signally showed itself in the patience and perseverance, which they manifested under all their heavy trials. Nay, so great was their proficiency in these Christian attainments, that they became examples to all the Believers in the neighbouring countries; that "from them sounded out the Word of the Lord," in these striking and blessed effects produced by it; and even the Apostle himself glorified of them in the Churches of God.

Happy is the Preacher, who can thus appeal to the Fruits of his doctrine, as displayed in the lives of those who profess to have embraced it! Strong indeed is the testimony given to the Power and Excel-

* 1 Thess. i. 2, 3. 7, 8. — iii. 6, 7. — iv. 9, 10. — v. 11. — 2 Thess. i. 3, 4.

lence of the Gospel, when those who profess it, thus adorn and recommend it by their conduct.

Here then is a still further subject for personal enquiry. Do *we thus* adorn and glorify the Gospel? Do *we* thus show forth its power and excellence in *our* lives? Do *we* abound in faith, hope, and love, those pure and genuine Fruits of true Christianity? If the Apostle were writing *to us*, and enforcing the exercise of these Christian Graces, could he justly say, as he said to the Thessalonians, "*even as also Ye do.*" Let us endeavour to feel the importance of this enquiry. As Christians, we have not only our own salvation at stake, but the honour of our divine Religion. We are required to uphold that honour; and to this end to let it be seen in our own conduct, that the Doctrine which we hold is a Doctrine according to Godliness. We are required to be "careful in maintaining good works," to "let our light shine before men," to "hold forth the word of life." Without such an agreement between our profession and our practice, far from glorifying the Gospel, we shall dishonour and disgrace it, and shall furnish occasion to those who are inclined to speak evil of it. Besides, if we are Christians indeed, we shall anxiously desire

that other persons should become so too. If we have ourselves tasted that the Lord is gracious, it will be one of the first wishes of our heart to be instrumental in making others partakers of the like precious faith with ourselves. We cannot but desire that the Word of the Lord should have free course; that it should run and be glorified; that it should spread from heart to heart, from house to house, from place to place. There are probably some, possibly many individuals among our friends, our acquaintance, and our neighbours, in whose spiritual concerns we feel a lively interest; and for whose conversion and salvation we anxiously long. The Apostle's Exhortation in the text shows us, in this case, to what means we must primarily have recourse. We must *pray* for this blessed work. It is God only, who giveth the increase. It is the Spirit only, who can open the heart to receive, to understand, and to love the truth as it is in Jesus. There is no Teacher like Him; nor will any one learn to any real purpose, till he is thus taught of God. But in respect to this as well as to every other Gift from above, Prayer is the appointed Instrument for obtaining it. We must not omit, we must not cease to pray for those, whose spiritual good we have at heart. In due

time we may hope to reap, if we faint not. But to the efficacy of our prayers for them in secret, let us add also the benefit of our good example in their sight. Let it be our aim, by a suitable, a consistent, and an irreproachable conduct, to soften their prejudices, and to win them to Jesus Christ. Let them see in us a clear and a bright example of what Religion really is; that so their mistakes respecting it may be corrected. Let them see, that it leads those, who embrace it, to be kind, cheerful, and contented, to be meek, patient, and industrious. Let them see that it enlivens the spirits, amends the tempers, and improves the dispositions; that it makes persons orderly, and submissive, and faithful in discharging the duties of their station, and ready, and disposed, so far as their means may extend, to every good work. In short, let them see in our example, that true Religion is a reasonable and a happy thing: that while it elevates the affections and purifies the heart, it makes its followers happier and better, than all the rest of mankind. Thus shall we glorify the Word of the Lord, and shall be instrumental in spreading the savour of real Christianity.

"Finally, Brethren (in the words of the Apostle), pray for us." Pray for the Minis-

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* 1 Thess. ii. 19.

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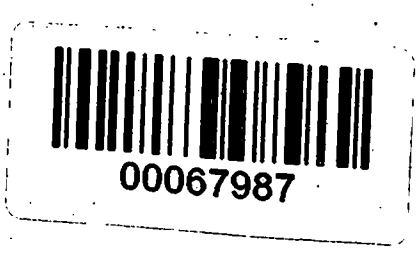

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